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Sex and the single Christian

THE HEADLINE in the *Chicago Tribune* read: “‘Stunning change’ say local Catholics.” Pope Francis had convened an international assembly of Roman Catholic bishops and, in a preliminary report from the assembly, was calling for the church to welcome and accept gay people, unmarried couples, and those who have divorced. This marks a new, softer tone in the church’s traditional positions on sexual issues.

As expected, conservative bishops are suggesting that the report should be shredded. Along with some fellow Catholics, they insist on the importance of maintaining traditional church standards in the face of growing secularism and moral relativism. But many other faithful Catholics are embarrassed by the fact that the church’s traditional positions are increasingly removed from the way human beings actually behave.

Local Protestant and Catholic pastors have long been on the front lines of the conflict. After all, it’s in the privacy of the pastor’s study that the gap between what the church says and the way people live becomes apparent.

When I talked with couples who were planning their weddings, I’d ask each person for his or her address. I soon realized that often the couple shared an address. According to most Protestant denominations they were living in sin. Should I have terminated those interviews and lectured the couple on tradi-

tional church values and practice? I never did. Part of the reason is that I’d learned firsthand from my children that they were living in a world vastly different from the one I’d known as a young man. Many of us pastors, on learning that a couple shared an address, continued the conversation. By the end of my pastoral ministry, this situation had become the norm.

Pastors understand the tension between traditional values and reality. They understand that human beings have the capacity, need, and desire for fully expressed sexuality and that this comes long before marriage is possible or practical. As the average age for marriage rises, the tension becomes even more intense. For a cardiology resident and a fledgling attorney working 90-hour weeks, marriage doesn’t seem like a viable option. A pastor must decide whether to espouse traditional church doctrine or extend understanding of people’s life situations.

In *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, Robert Putnam and David Campbell say that one of the reasons young adults have fled the church is that they find its teaching about human sexuality judgmental, harsh, and exclusivist. I believe that we’re called to be less judgmentally certain and more understanding. On this issue, it’s time for the church to stop talking and proclaiming, and instead to listen for a while to the world and to the church’s people.

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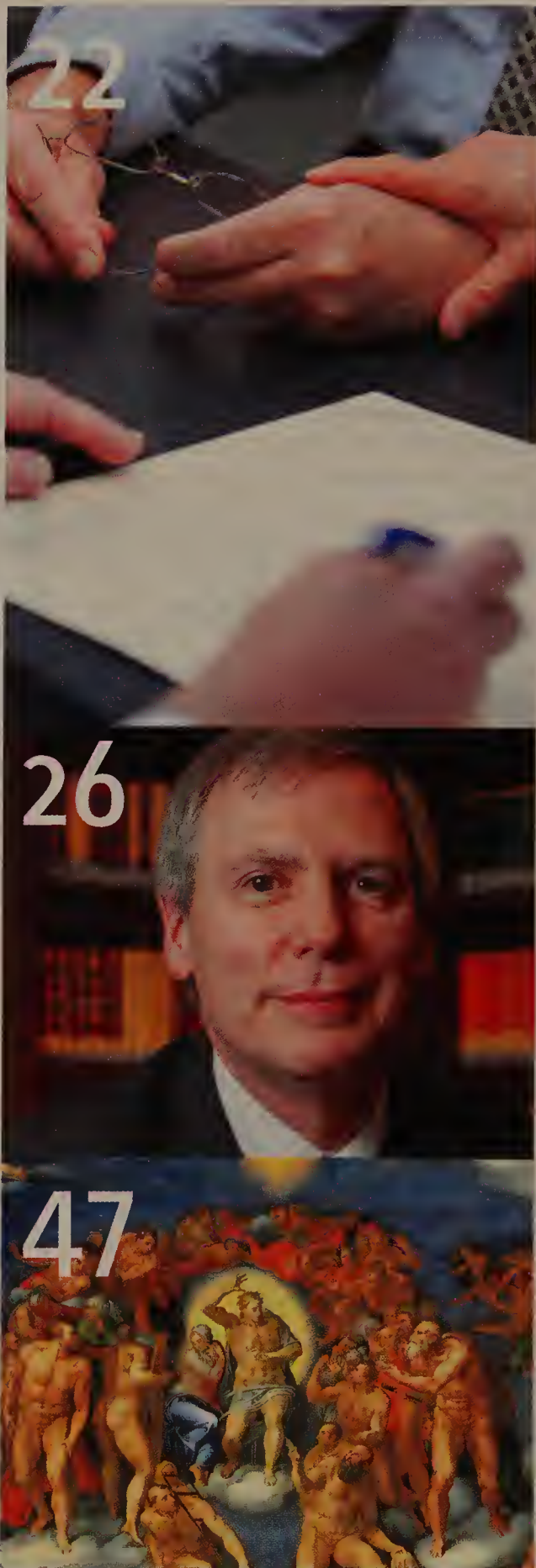
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Marriage expectations

Gerald Schlabach's attempt at theologizing a passage from Paul to embrace same sex marriage is flawed at an elementary exegetical level and is at best an attempt at accommodating an unfortunate turn of cultural values ("What is marriage now?" Oct. 29).

Elevating sexuality to the level approached in this article overlooks the objective fact that sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments. One does not have to be a hate monger to recognize that current cultural value is not an accurate representation of biblical mores.

The fact that it is better to marry than to burn with passion in no way counters the expectation in scripture (from its first chapter to its last) that marriage is to be between a man and a woman, never between members of the same sex. That concept does not exist in scripture, nor in Judeo-Christian history, as far as I can tell.

That being said, the author is right that sexuality should belong solely to marriage and that the church should work compassionately with those who have fallen prey to the cultural approval of cohabitation (my interpretation of his somewhat differing statement).

The author is also correct that it "would be foolish to claim that this framework alone will resolve everything." In fact, it does not resolve anything. It merely enables a person who wants to perform same-sex marriages a flawed rationale for doing so.

William Sillings

christiancentury.org comment

Some years back I was a case manager for individuals diagnosed with HIV and AIDS, the majority of whom were in a loving relationship with their partner of the same sex. All ages were represented, and I was inspired by their faithfulness and the stories they told of



rejection and pain from the religious community. I was invited and attended several marriages. They were not recognized by law or the church, but in private ceremonies they promised love, support, and fidelity.

Something that seemed so right and true will continue with or without the sanction of the church. It needs support from church and community, and I am celebrating as this becomes a reality. Thank you for addressing this most important question.

Arlys Chapdelaine

christiancentury.org comment

Nonprofit wages . . .

I appreciated Robert Francis's article on the dilemma of wages and the nonprofit world ("Making payroll," Oct. 29). I administer a church-related nonprofit corporation that owns and runs an apartment building for the elderly subsidized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Our income comes from residents' rent and a HUD subsidy.

All our salaries, including mine, are right at or under the HUD low-income level for a single person for Wyoming. Our starting wage has been \$10 an hour since 2001, but we have always started employees higher because of previous work experience. Our service coordinator is funded by a grant that could go away at the whim of Congress. The board developed a generous benefits package within HUD regulations, which includes participation in the Disciples of Christ pension fund and funding 90 percent of the health benefits, paid sick leave, and vacation days, which increase with years of service. The result is employees who stay with the organization, which benefits the mission of a nonprofit.

The board recently discussed paying the employees their current wages and what the board funds in benefits and having them pay their own retirement and health insurance. The result would be nice wages on paper and becoming an uncaring employer. That discussion ended very quickly.

Kenneth Humphrey

christiancentury.org comment

Environmental discipleship . . .

Watershed disciples" (Oct. 29), by Katherine Mast, reminded me of the quote: "We will not work to save what we do not love, and we cannot love what we do not know." Part of the challenge for Christians getting reconnected to creation and its care is that many of our efforts are abstract and unconnected to the places where we live, work, minister, and raise our families.

Reconnecting with our watershed is one important way to begin to know, love, and care for our place. Thanks for these important insights about watershed discipleship.

John Rosenberg

christiancentury.org comment

November 12, 2014

Care at the end

A recent cover of *People* magazine featured the story of Brittany Maynard, a 29-year-old woman with brain cancer who had announced the date she intended to end her own life. She had moved to Oregon, where assisted suicide is legal. Maynard wanted to make sure that she could be prescribed a drug so that she could end her life and reduce her suffering and that of her family.

This is a familiar argument. When former archbishop of Canterbury George Carey recently announced his support for a bill to legalize assisted suicide in the United Kingdom, he cited the need to reduce unnecessary suffering. Others argue that individuals have the right to control their own dying and that such a right includes being able to get a prescription for a lethal dose of drugs.

In the United States, assisted suicide has mostly been a hard sell. Since Oregon legalized physician-assisted suicide in 1994, more than 140 legislative proposals in 27 states have failed. Oregon, Washington, Montana, Vermont, and Arizona are the only states where physician-assisted suicide is legal.

Among the most compelling reasons to resist legalization is that every human being is of inestimable worth, a worth undiminished by illness or disease. The worry is that once assisted suicide is tolerated, it will likely become more and more expected. Social pressure will increase for people to end their lives, since society has deemed them lives not worth living. (Physician and ethicist Daniel Sulmasy sees this process happening in the Netherlands—see p. 26.)

Dr. Atul Gawande, author of *Being Mortal*, says that the legalization of assisted suicide expresses people's lack of confidence in medicine's ability to manage pain and provide them with their "best possible" last days.

Rather than embrace assisted suicide, we might better concentrate on improving end-of-life care so that pain is managed and a person's wishes are respected. There are some obvious steps to take. One is to encourage conversations about treatment. A remarkably successful effort of this kind was led by medical and community leaders in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Their work shows what can be accomplished by a consistent, patient-centered discussion of advance directives on care (see p. 22).

A very simple step is to allow Medicare physicians to bill for spending time talking with patients about end-of-life care. Sadly, when this reform was proposed as part of the Affordable Care Act, opponents demonized it as the creation of "death panels."

Another step is to broaden doctors' awareness and use of palliative care. Great strides have been made in this field, but training in palliative medicine is still spotty in medical schools, and many physicians have insufficient information.

Medicine more than ever has the means to postpone death. More than ever it has the means to ease suffering. The challenge is to make medicine a true partner with patients in the holy work of dying.

**Rather than embrace assisted suicide,
we might better concentrate on
improving end-of-life care.**

CENTURY marks

PAYROLL BOOST: Raymond Burse, interim president of Kentucky State University, is giving up \$90,000 of his \$350,000 annual salary to increase payment to minimum-wage earners on campus. Their pay will increase from \$7.25 an hour to \$10.25 an hour, more than the \$10.10 minimum wage President Obama is advocating. The increase will stay in effect even after a permanent KSU president is put in place. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, other college presidents have made similar moves. At Hampton University the president donated over \$100,000 to boost low-wage earners to \$9 per hour (*Vox*, October 15).

LOVE AND BEAUTY: When Robert Deming lost both his mother and sister in his youth, he was so angry at God that he decided he was an atheist. He eventually

came back to the faith not by argument or reason but by the love of his wife. "I would not be a Christian if not for two things," he says. "The love of someone patient and the beauty of adoration offered lovingly." His advice to Christians with family or friends who have left the fold: "Be patient with those you love . . . [and] do what you do with beauty, care, and reverence" (thesubdeansstall.org, October 12).

ARRESTED: Louisville Presbyterian Seminary theology professor Shannon Craigo-Snell and student David Wigger were arrested last month during a protest rally in Ferguson, Missouri. Wigger said his faith fuels his passion for social justice. He said he went to the Moral Monday rally that protested the death of 18-year-old Michael Brown in order to support the leaders in the movement and the local youth who are trying

to get justice for the unarmed youth shot by a Ferguson policeman back in August. At a rally with big-name speakers like Cornel West and Jim Wallis, youth leaders stood up and demanded to be heard (WFPL, October 17).

MASS ATTENDANCE: A group of Catholics in the Detroit area is sponsoring "mass mobs" one Sunday a month at churches where attendance is typically sparse. On a designated mass Sunday, attendance swells—up to 2,000 at one church, which netted an offering of more than \$19,000, ten times the usual amount. One parishioner said she hoped the movement would encourage more Catholics to attend mass. Similar movements have been started in Catholic churches in other cities (NPR, October 9).

PEACE SIGN: A small band of Jews and Muslims marched through one of the busiest squares in Washington, D.C., last month shouting "Spread Hummus! Not Hate!" The one-day event began at the University of Maryland, traveled by bus to a mosque in D.C., and ended at a private residence in Virginia. It was designed to counter anti-Islam ads that appeared months ago on D.C. city buses. Organized by the newly formed Greater Washington Muslim-Jewish Forum, the bus tour served up pita bread and hummus at most of its six stops (RNS).

HOW DOCTORS DIE: At the 50th reunion of his medical school class, Dr. James Sabin said his classmates were able to talk freely about death. One noted that only half of them would be present at their 60th reunion. The dominant tones in their death talk were a matter-of-factness, gallows humor, and curiosity about the future of the human species and the planet. Doctors typically don't talk much

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"Is this from the community garden? It tastes sanctimonious."

about death, despite dealing with it routinely. When they do, they call attention to the limits of modern medicine and eschew any heroic measures at the end of their own life (Hastings Center Over 65 blog, September 1).

ROOM FOR THE DEAD: Cemetery crowding, especially in large cities or among religious groups that forbid cremation, is becoming a problem worldwide, forcing some creative solutions. Residents of Mexico City must exhume and remove their relatives' remains after a number of years. A Tower for the Dead project is in the works there: it will include a vertical necropolis along with a subterranean complex 820 feet deep. A simpler solution is to stack graves on top of each other and to share tombstones. Other options being considered are stacking the dead above the ground in niches built into a wall or housing the dead in buildings with each floor resembling a traditional cemetery (AP).

DRUMBEAT OF WAR: "The mainstream U.S. media plays [sic] the role of government lapdog more than watchdog," says Medea Benjamin, author of *Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control*. By repeatedly showing gruesome beheadings by ISIS and giving abundant airtime to hawkish politicians and pundits, the media have turned a war-weary public to lend support to airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. The media are not providing a vigorous debate about military actions and alternatives to it. They also have not focused on the consequences of war. The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported that U.S. airstrikes have attracted 6,000 recruits to ISIS (*Common Dreams*, October 10).

SPOILS OF WAR: Human Rights Watch says that the so-called Islamic State is holding hundreds of the members of the Yazidi sect captive in Iraq and Syria. The Islamic State defends this practice in *Dabiq*, its slick online English-language newspaper. IS claims it is reviving an old Muslim practice of claiming women and children as spoils of war and denies that they have separated mothers from their children. By forcing these people to become Muslims,

“This is the worst threat we’ve faced since the Mongol invasion of 1259.”

— **Justin Welby**, archbishop of Canterbury, quoting Middle Eastern Christians with whom he met to talk about the threat of the radical Islamist group ISIS, which he termed a once-in-a-millennium threat (*Telegraph*, October 16)

“We have lost a reliance on not only our own families, but so much of what our churches and private organizations used to do. They used to have wonderful food pantries. They used to provide clothing for those who really needed it. But we have gotten away from that. Now we’re at a point where the government will just give away anything.”

— Iowa Republican Senate candidate **Joni Ernst**, in an anti-Obamacare statement during a campaign speech (*Daily Intelligencer*, October 16)

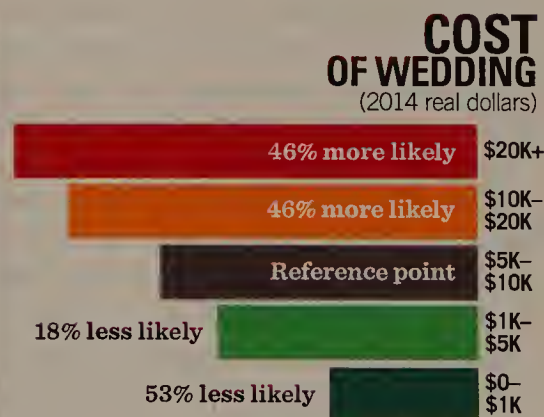
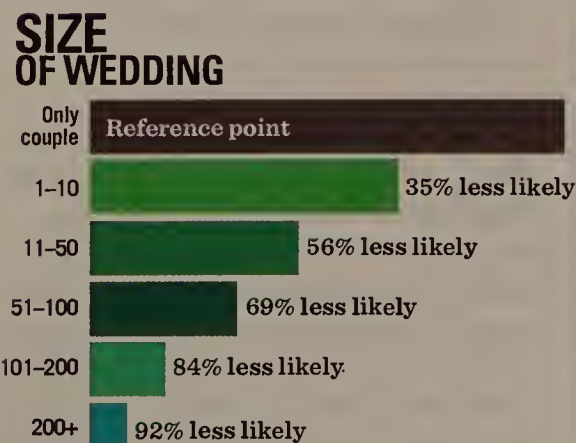
they argue, they are saving them from idolatry, and by selling women to IS soldiers they are keeping the soldiers from the temptation of adultery (Reuters).

REPRESSED DESIRES? Two researchers from Brock University analyzed Google Trends data over a two-year period and discovered that residents in states that tend to be more religious and politically conservative produce the most searches using words like *sex*, *gay sex*, *porn*, *XXX*, *free porn*, and *gay porn*. A 2009 Harvard state-by-state study also showed a significant correlation between social conservatism and subscriptions to online porn sites (*Washington Post*, October 7).

BEST BOOKS: *Church Times* (August 16) has published a list of the 100 best Christian books of all time, drawing on nominations from their book reviewers, with the final decision made by a panel of judges. Enduring value was a key criterion. The judges acknowledged a dearth of female authors. The top ten: *Confessions*, by St. Augustine; *The Rule of Benedict*, by St. Benedict; *Summa Theologica*, by St. Thomas Aquinas; *Revelations of Divine Love* by Julian of Norwich; the *Divine Comedy*, by Dante Alighieri; *Pensées*, by Blaise Pascal; *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, by John Bunyan; *City of God*, by St. Augustine; *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis; and *The Complete English Poems*, by George Herbert.

LIKELIHOOD OF DIVORCE

SOURCE: ATLANTIC, OCTOBER 14



Prayers with feet

by Ragan Sutterfield

NOAH'S ARK lurched and started. An inflatable mosque and Hindu temple bounced alongside it as pagan drums sounded and Hare Krishnas danced. More than 10,000 people of faith were huddled together off Columbus Circle in Manhattan on September 21, waiting to join in the largest-yet show of public will to address climate change.

Many came in response to Bill McKibben's "call to arms" in *Rolling Stone* magazine. "This is an invitation," he wrote, "to anyone who'd like to prove to themselves, and to their children, that they give a damn about the biggest crisis our civilization has ever faced." The UN would be meeting once again to begin climate talks, and people from "every corner of our society" needed to come together to demand real action. By "every corner" McKibben meant trade union members, Superstorm Sandy survivors, health-care workers, and "clergy and laypeople from synagogues and churches and mosques, now rising in record numbers to say, 'If the Bible means anything, it means that we need to care for the world God gave us.'"

That world has already warmed 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit above preindustrial levels, and the rate of this warming has been sharply increasing. The past 20 years were the hottest in at least 400 years. These rising temperatures are having an effect. California is burning and devastated by drought. Last year in the Philippines, Typhoon Haiyan killed 7,000 people—and produced the strongest winds ever recorded on land. This is only the beginning. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an international group of 1,300 climate scientists, predicts that the next century will see a

further increase of 2.5 to ten degrees. Whether we reach the low or the high end of that range has everything to do with whether we curb our greenhouse gas emissions now.

So 400,000 of us went to New York to demand that the world's governments do more than offer nice talk and toothless resolutions, that they show the same enthusiasm for preventing the planet from burning that they do for suing each other over trade issues. And as so many

faith to witness to our care for God's creation?"

For Johnson, this particular witness has a great deal to do with hope in the face of the dire news around climate change. "Because of Jesus," she said, "I'm a hopeful person who knows that I am loved by God. My theology tells me that I must be hopeful."

For all the dire warnings, the atmosphere at the interfaith service also had a hint of hopeful celebration. "We will

The march was a procession of dire lament and raucous hope.

other movements have done, we put our bodies in the streets.

There were 30,000 of us at the interfaith service and 5,000 representing faith communities in another section of the march. Almost a tenth of the 400,000 marchers were there, at least in part, to recognize the sacredness of this earth our world seems set on desecrating. As GreenFaith executive director Fletcher Harper told me, climate change "undoes the kind of work our faith communities have done for centuries."

Before the march I spoke with Stephanie Johnson, an Episcopal priest who brought a full bus of people from New England. With their bishop's approval, they celebrated the Eucharist together on the road. Johnson highlighted the eucharistic dismissal: "Go forth to love and serve the Lord." She commented, "What better way to go forth than with 10,000 other people of

overcome," broke out in an impromptu chorus somewhere. Pessimists don't tend to gather for marches in the streets. The people gathered knew that something can and must be done.

Caleb Bussey, a Wake Forest University School of Divinity grad, was dressed in a T-shirt with a stole. "I believe in resurrection," he said, "and yet I also sometimes have trouble with hope, so the very fact that I can bear witness to something hopeful is inspiring."

It was a common sentiment—people showing up to be inspired. But inspiration can't stay on the mountaintop. "The hope I see for resurrection," said Bussey, "are the conversations that begin here and the skills for organizing that can be brought back to our local communities."

Such conversations were beginning quickly. Bussey and I soon found ourselves talking to organizers from the Interfaith Power and Light group, an organization that began with efforts by northern California churches to pur-

chase renewable energy together. It now has chapters spanning 38 states.

The faith community was supposed to join the main march at 12:30, but it was past 1 p.m. and no movement had started. We knew this was good news: the crowd was very large, far exceeding the 100,000 people expected by organizers.

Suddenly a tall, elderly black man made his way toward the IPL contingent, wearing a suit, a white fedora, and a medal with Martin Luther King's face etched on it. "This is the 'I have a dream' medal," he told me. "Coretta Scott King gave it to me. There are only 20 of these in existence!" This was Gerald Durley, a Baptist minister whose name appears on the Civil Rights Walk of Fame.

"Right now we are fighting for the freedom for young children to breathe," he went on, "the freedom for old people to walk around in healthy air, the freedom to eat food that is not filled with toxins from fracking up the ground." His voice boomed as he continued: "We are going to have to do two things: risk and sacrifice."

This was what we were in the streets calling for as the world's leaders gathered at the UN. We need risk and sacrifice on a scale typically called for only as part of a war effort. Carbon dioxide is overflowing the earth's natural receptacles, warming the atmosphere, and killing off coral reefs. The Union of Concerned Scientists has called for an 80 percent reduction in U.S. emissions between 2000 and 2050. Yet greenhouse gas emissions rose 20 percent globally between 2000 and 2010, and they've kept on rising ever since.

Without risk and sacrifice, all this spells disaster. It is going to take serious changes in our current ways of life if we are going to continue to live on a planet that supports human flourishing.

As I walked I caught up with Fred Bahnson, director of the Food, Faith, and Religious Leadership Initiative at Wake Forest Divinity School. Bahnson is a quiet guy who likes to be in his garden in North Carolina. He joined the throng in New York because, he said, "I want to put my body where my beliefs are. . . . It is clear

that our leaders are not going to take action unless we make them." I asked Bahnson what role a march like this can play for the church. "I hope this catalyzes within the church the idea that the ecological crisis is not some side issue, something some people are into, like youth ministry or altar guild, but is at the heart of our faith," he said. "The dome in the midst of the waters, spoken of in Genesis, is under threat from our own hand. If we really believe that Christ will redeem the cosmos, then we need to stop thwarting and start joining with Christ in that redemptive work now."

As the march moved into the heart of Times Square, the word began to spread that we would be asked to leave the march before reaching the planned endpoint. The crowd was too big, and the police were asking us to disperse.

I spotted Ben Stewart, a liturgical theologian at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and wondered what a liturgist might think of a march like this.

"I talk with my students about processions as prayers with feet," Stewart said. "This is a kind of prayer."

He'd come to New York on the "Climate Train," an Amtrak train filled with activists. "Someone rewrote the song, 'People Get Ready, There's a Train a-Comin.' It was this symbol that participated in the reality to which it pointed: we were on this train hurtling toward New York City with people singing, 'there's a train a-coming.' It was really powerful."

Stewart's comments recalled a lecture I'd recently heard by ethicist Willis Jenkins of the University of Virginia. Jenkins believes we stand little chance of significantly addressing a problem like climate change by simply being the moral voice or trying to change someone's

The farm wife repeats a lullaby

When Ruth cries out, terrified
by what stalks the root cellar
or chases her toward a cliff,
we sing our favorite chorus:

*Vegetables grow in my garden,
God sends the rain,
Vegetables grow in my garden,
God sends the sun.*

With each verse, we substitute
something new: *carrots, potatoes,
rutabagas, coconuts*. Like sheep
that leap a fence, we never stop

to reconsider: *sunflowers,
snapdragons, poinsettia, burr
thistle*. Rabbits wriggle in
and soon the gate swings open

for *rhinoceros* and *pythons* . . .
till we make room for everything
under the sun, under the rain,
in the garden

where Ruth can fall asleep.

Ragan Sutterfield is a student at Virginia Theological Seminary and author of *Cultivating Reality (Cascade)* and *This Is My Body (forthcoming from Convergent)*.


Shari Wagner

worldview. He writes in *The Future of Ethics* that we need instead a “view of culture in which morality is learned in bodies, carried by practices, and formed into repertoires that teach agents how to see and solve problems.” There is more hope, then, in our liturgies, our songs, and our works of charity than in any finger-wagging or attempts at the moral conversion of oil company executives. This is part of the reason I ended up in seminary rather than a school of public policy.

Soon we turned into a street with live hip-hop music, booths from various or-

ganizations, and a mercifully long row of portable toilets. As I turned toward the subway that would start my journey home, liturgical words of sending echoed in my head: “Our service has now ended, and our service to the world begins.” This march, this processional service of dire lament and raucous hope, was over. But this was no end in itself. It was a place we’d come, as Stewart said to me, “to remind ourselves who we are.” Now it was time to go to work for the changes that have to happen: advocating for bike lanes on our city streets,

blockading the next oil pipeline that goes through our town, gathering to fast and pray for change.

I’ll be joining in future climate actions and inviting others to as well. But I’ll also be processing every Sunday, singing hymns, proclaiming the gospel, and joining around the common meal of the one who came to reconcile all creation. Through this I hope to participate in the practices necessary for us to find our way forward—to develop the hope and courage to take the risks and make the sacrifices now required. 

Lebanese Christians get ready for ISIS

Taking up arms

by Wadih El Hayek and Youssef Zbib

ON THE TERRACE of his small apartment in Sin El Fil, east of Beirut, Ghassan sat cradling a Kalashnikov rifle outfitted with a military-grade laser sight and listening to chatter on a military-grade Motorola radio. He is part of a group of Christians allied with Hezbollah who are preparing to fight Sunni extremist groups originating in Syria.

“The rifle is provided by Hezbollah, but we bought the radios ourselves,” he explained. “There are more than 30 groups like mine scattered across Lebanon in Christian areas.”

In Syria’s ongoing civil war, the Shi’a Muslim group Hezbollah has joined Shi’a Muslim Iran in backing President Bashar al-Assad. In August, the Syrian conflict spilled into Lebanon as Sunni jihadists believed to be affiliated with the Nusra Front and the Islamic State (or ISIS) waged an attack on Hezbollah and the Lebanese army. They captured 37

soldiers and executed three of them. Christians in the country were further alarmed when graffiti glorifying ISIS appeared on church walls.

“Most of us are ex-military who used to serve in units loyal to General [Michel] Aoun,” said Ghassan, referring to a Christian who is a former army commander and now a leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, a largely Christian political party.

“We left the army when he was forced into exile. When he came back, we became part of his close-protection security detail, and shortly after that we started receiving light and medium weapons and ammunition directly from Hezbollah through another retired general.” Ghassan declined to reveal the name of the retired general or the name of the Hezbollah contact who is supplying his group with arms.

Hezbollah, a political party with a military wing, emerged during the Israeli

invasion of Lebanon in 1982 as a part of the fight against Israel. During the war, Hezbollah also fought several battles against the Lebanese Forces, the major Christian militia, and with the Lebanese army, which was seen as defending Christian interests. Aoun was the head of the army during these battles.

In 2006 Hezbollah forged an alliance with Aoun, calling it an effort to forge unity between Christians and Muslims. Critics dismissed the alliance as a maneuver to break Hezbollah’s political isolation among non-Shi’a forces and to improve Aoun’s chances of being elected president of the republic.

Lebanon has long had a thriving black market in armaments. A veteran dealer whom we’ll call Jimmy said he now restricts his sales to Shi’ites and Christians. “I would never sell my guns to Sunnis now,” he said. “They are all ISIS sympathizers. I sell exclusively to fellow

Shi'ites and to Christians, and actually the demand from Christians has increased immensely in the last few months because Christians and Shi'ites are now the primary targets for ISIS. We are in this fight together."

Jimmy said Christians and Shi'ites do not have any deeply rooted religious or historical conflicts, whereas Shi'a and Sunni Muslims have a history of bloody conflict dating back more than 1,400 years. "We have no issues with the Christians."

"ISIS is a threat all over Lebanon. We are prepared."

Ghassan too believes that the Shi'ites and Christians of Lebanon need to join forces. "We are the last line of defense here in Beirut. If ISIS and the takfiris [religious zealots] manage to break through the front lines on the border, our area here will be the last line of defense before the capital [Beirut] falls."

According to Jimmy, ISIS forces might be able to cross the border, but entering Beirut will be much more difficult.

The two agree that no one can rely on the Lebanese state for protection, and that everyone who wants to survive needs to be armed.

"They [ISIS forces] are kidnapping army soldiers and beheading them. What do you think they will do to us?" said Jimmy.

Ghassan said, "I will not let them rape my wife and daughter or sell them in a slave market. I will not flee the country I was born in to become a humiliated refugee in a foreign land."

According to Ghassan, ISIS and other Sunni fundamentalist groups have infiltrated refugee camps and other areas of the country and have planted sleeper cells. "Just last month we helped the Lebanese army capture two ISIS sleeper cells in Sin El Fil," he said. "It was never made public in order not to cause any

rash repercussions in the streets against innocent Syrians, but ISIS is a serious and present threat all over Lebanon, and we are ready and prepared."

Over the last six months, Syrian refugees have been chased out of their homes in more than one area, and in some cases Syrians were beaten up and their camps burned to the ground.

According to Jimmy, ISIS has massed fighters from all over the world to kill Shi'ites and Christians in the Levant. "They [ISIS] have gathered Afghans, Chechens, Saudis and Pakistanis to

invade our land and cut our throats. The least we can do is stock up on weapons and prepare a warm welcome for them."

The Lebanese civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1990 was in part an effort to reduce the power of Christians. The 1989 Taif Agreement, which was brokered under Syrian, Arab, and international

patronage, gave more executive power to the prime minister, who is a Sunni Muslim in accordance with Lebanon's sectarian quota. More seats in the parliament were also reserved for Muslims.

Despite the oft-repeated line about factions in Lebanon being "neither vanquished nor victorious," many Christians believe they were the big loser in the civil war. Major Christian political powers—chief among them Aoun and the Lebanese Forces—were sidelined because they resisted the presence of Syrian forces.

Given these complicated political sensitivities, releasing information about the demographics of the Lebanese population is taboo. The last official census conducted in Lebanon was in 1932, when the country was still under a French mandate. A study released by the Lebanese Information Center, a think tank based in Washington, D.C., and affiliated with the Christian party Lebanese Forces, claims that Christians made up 34 per cent of the Lebanese population in 2011. The major Christian bodies are the Maronite Church, affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, and the Greek Orthodox Church. **CC**

Moved

*Life smooths us, perfects as does the river the stone,
and there is no place our Beloved is not flowing,
though the current's force you may not like.
—St. Teresa of Ávila*

This rounding roughs us even as it smooths,
the force of God's water strong,
tumbles the small stones even as it soothes
and carries them lightly along,
The rain falls full and fills the streams.
The river drinks their love.
The trees bend heavy with dreams.
There's nothing that does not move.

Borne along by fire and flood,
by wind that tongues and grooves,
our bodies brimmed with blood
that feeds us as it proves
perfection is no steady state.
It's on the way and always late.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

Wadih El Hayek is a Lebanese journalist and documentary filmmaker. Youssef Zbib works for Transterra Media, which is based in Beirut.

Amid drought, churches draw together

In what is supposed to be the harvest season, many parts of California are feeling the effects of the drought that has raged for most of the year.

"We don't know what's going to be coming out of the fields, if anything," said Brian Malison, lead pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Visalia, in the southern part of the Central Valley. "There were a lot of farmers in the spring who didn't put down seed or let their fields go."

In an area where many people are involved in the agriculture industry, people have had to make decisions about how best to limit the devastation of the drought. Sometimes that has meant not planting, because the costs of hiring workers for the harvest are too high.

The U.S. Drought Monitor, produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other agencies, as of mid-October showed much of California and parts of Nevada and Texas at the highest level—"exceptional drought." Much of the west is experiencing "moderate to extreme drought."

Christ Lutheran held a fund-raiser for the families of farmworkers who were facing limited employment opportunities. Malison spoke with the director of the local food bank in early summer and learned that there wasn't federal or state funding to supply diapers, so the church donated 100,000 of them.

The congregation has also addressed the stewardship of water in its worship services, "recognizing how water has played a deep and important part in the history of God's people," Malison said. "We begin with a personal reflection, 'how am I doing?'"

The community has a new perspective on the preciousness of water, he said.

"There's a deeper appreciation of what water means. I think this is going to leave an indelible mark on people's spiritual lives."

Prayers for rain need to be framed with careful theology, Malison noted.

"I think it requires a tremendous amount of sensitivity when asking God to do things in the atmospheric sense," Malison said. "I would love it if we had 20 inches of rain this year, but if we had 20 inches of rain in two weeks, the effects would be equally catastrophic in flooding out fields."

In nearby Hanford, First Christian Reformed Church has participated in three community prayer services and hosted one in the past 14 months, said Justin Carruthers, copastor and director of congregational ministries. "It always starts with a spirit of praise and adora-

tion, and then we can move into our petitions."

The congregation includes many people who work in the dairy industry and who feel the effects of the drought daily, he said. Over the past four to five years the drought has worsened, and recently part of the community saw its well go dry.

Yet the prayer services have drawn the community together amid the loss, as in a funeral, he said.

Further south in the state, congregations are connecting around more careful use of the water they have, now and for the future.

Lisa Novick—director of outreach and K-12 education at the Theodore Payne Foundation for Wild Flowers and Native Plants in Sun Valley—works with community groups, including congrega-



LANDSCAPE CONVERSION: Students of Meher Montessori School in Monterey Park, which shares space with St. Paul's Lutheran Church, create a garden next to the church with plants that are adapted to dry conditions.

PHOTO BY LISA NOVICK

tions, to teach how native plants are important for combating drought.

"I see the drought as an opportunity because so much of Southern California and indeed the West has been planted with nonnative plants that have been brought by people from where they came from," she said. "People can reevaluate the practices that just become habit."

She received more requests from congregations as the drought has continued. More than a dozen churches that are part of a San Fernando Valley consortium want to change the landscaping around their churches. Native plants use one-seventh of the water that nonnatives do.

"Churches and any place of worship are the perfect place to do this kind of landscape conversion because you've already got people there who know the importance of being mindful," she said, "and already want to be of benefit to their community."

One congregation she has worked with, St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Monterey Park, has partnered with the Montessori school that rents part of the church to plant a native garden, which is used as an outdoor classroom.

"Plants are more than just furniture for the garden, they help sustain us through supporting the pollinators, birds, and other insect and animal life that are part of ecosystem services," Novick said, "such as reforestation and watershed protection."

St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Glendale, with high visibility on a boulevard, is swapping out its lawn and will have discreet signs for passersby to read.

"We want to educate people through the beauty of these gardens that they don't have to sacrifice aesthetics to do the environmentally responsible thing," Novick said.

As she works with children and youth, she finds that middle-school and high-school students are highly aware of climate change and environmental destruction.

"Every time I do a garden conversion and work with this age of kids especially, they're really on fire and driven, because they feel like it's not all doom and gloom," she said. "We can do something where we are." —Celeste Kennel-Shank, *Christian Century*

Ten seminaries given \$1.5 million to address topics in science

RESPONDING TO a real or perceived gap between science and faith, ten Christian U.S. seminaries will receive a combined \$1.5 million in grants to include science in their curricula, the American Association for the Advancement of Science announced October 8.

The John Templeton Foundation, which has funded various efforts to bridge science and faith, including giving \$3.75 million to AAAS for the project, will award grants ranging from \$90,000 to \$200,000.

"Many [religious leaders] don't get a lot of science in their training and yet they become the authority figures that many people in society look up to for advice for all kinds of things, including issues related to science and technology," said Jennifer Wiseman, director of the AAAS Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion.

The selected seminaries are:

Andover Newton Theological School (Newton Centre, Massachusetts)

Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C.)

Columbia Theological Seminary (Decatur, Georgia)

Concordia Seminary (St. Louis, Missouri)

Howard University's School of Divinity (Washington, D.C.)

Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (Pennsylvania)

Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University (Berkeley, California)

Multnomah Biblical Seminary (Portland, Oregon)

Regent University School of Divinity (Virginia Beach, Virginia)

Wake Forest University School of Divinity (Winston-Salem, North Carolina)

The grants will cover faculty activities, events, science resources, guest speakers, and other related costs. Seminaries may incorporate issues of modern technology, methods of science, or the history of science into courses seminary students already take, such as church history,

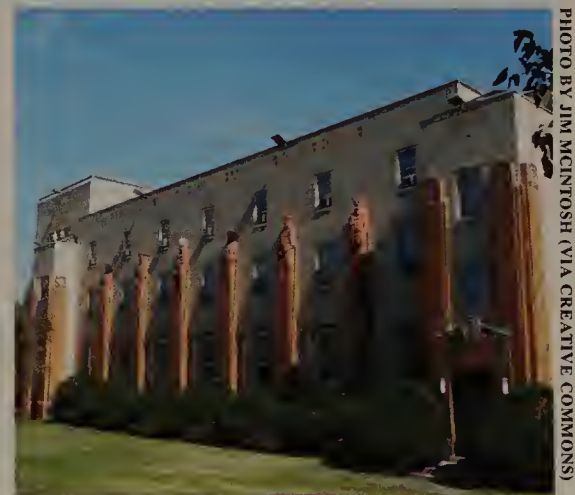
ethics, pastoral counseling, or systematic theology.

"There are interesting intersections of all these types of courses with either modern science or the history of science or the philosophy of science that would be very useful for these students to become acquainted with," Wiseman said.

A study released by AAAS earlier this year suggested potential conflict between religion and science. Twenty-two percent of scientists (and 20 percent of the general public) say religious people are hostile to science. On the flip side, 22 percent of the general population think scientists are hostile to religion, and of those who feel science and religion are in conflict, 52 percent sided with religion.

Yet those who are religious are often interested in learning how science can be used for the common good, Wiseman said.

"Having these conversations is important, but developing the platform and architecture for them is sometimes complicated," Wiseman said. "Science can be unifying to many people in society, both people of faith and people who don't share that faith. . . . Through what we're learning in science, I think we can come together to use that knowledge for great good." —Sarah Pulliam Bailey, Religion News Service



SCIENCE IN SEMINARY: Howard University's School of Divinity in Washington, D.C., is one of ten schools receiving grants to teach science.

PHOTO BY JIM MCINTOSH (VIA CREATIVE COMMONS)

General Seminary board keeps dean, offers to reinstate faculty

The embattled General Theological Seminary will keep its controversial dean and is prepared to reinstate the majority of its faculty.

In late September, eight full-time professors quit teaching classes and attending official seminary meetings or chapel services until they could sit down with the seminary board to discuss concerns about the seminary's dean, Kurt Dunkle.

The seminary board accepted the resignations of the faculty, which the professors said they had never offered. The dispute left the flagship Episcopal seminary scrambling to find teachers for its classes.

The board of GTS—a New York institution that has produced generations of bishops and noted theologians—said October 17 that the terminated faculty would be “invited to request provisional reinstatement as professors of the seminary.”

The board also voted to keep Dunkle as dean and president, concluding after hearing an independent report and “after extensive discussion that there are not sufficient grounds for terminating the Very Reverend Kurt Dunkle as president and dean,” the board wrote in a statement. “We reaffirm our call to him as president and dean and offer him our continuing support.”

The executive committee of the board said it is willing to talk with the professors and “to negotiate the terms of their provisional employment for the remainder of the academic year,” the board said in a statement.

A collective statement from faculty on October 21 said they were ready to accept the board's offer. “We also commit with energy to the holy work of reconciliation which we understand to be very important for the health of the entire institution,” the statement said.

Pennsylvania bishop Clifton Daniel, a member of the GTS board, called for “a season of self-examination and repentance” for GTS.

“I am encouraged by the decision of the executive committee to engage a skilled, qualified Christian mediator who

will call the dean, the board, the faculty, students (and perhaps representatives of the Alumni/ae Association) together to engage in a prayerful, structured and disciplined process of mediation and reconciliation,” Daniel said in a statement.

Daniel's statement and that of the eight faculty members looked ahead to conversation after the May 2015 graduation to determine next steps for the seminary.

While committing themselves fully to reconciliation in the remainder of the academic year, the professors wrote that if in May, “we find that the collective process of reconciliation has not worked well, we ask that there be some understanding that appropriate severance will be made available to enable us and our families to make a transition.”

New York bishop Andrew Dietsche, an ex officio member of the GTS board, said that the earlier resolution terminating the faculty had “obscured the dynam-



PEACE TALKS: The board of General Theological Seminary, located in Manhattan, has sought to reconcile faculty and dean.

ic of debate and persuasion within the board itself, and hid from view the genuinely wide diversity of thought and conviction across the board.”

More than 900 scholars from across the country had signed a letter of support for the eight faculty members, saying they will not lecture or speak at the seminary. The eight had charged that Dunkle had made sexist, racist, and homophobic comments and that he had shared a student's academic records with people who were not authorized to see them, which would violate federal academic privacy standards. —Sarah Pulliam Bailey, Religion News Service

Pakistan court upholds death penalty for Christian woman convicted of blasphemy

A Pakistani high court has upheld the death sentence given to Asia Bibi, a jailed Christian woman convicted of blasphemy in 2010, whose case at the time played into an atmosphere of recrimination and spawned the murders of several prominent human rights and political figures.

Bibi's lawyers had asked the Lahore High Court to overturn the death sentence, which was handed down after she had a row with Muslim women neighbors at a village well in Pakistan's Punjab Province.

Bibi's name and case have since become nearly synonymous with a sensitive national debate over blasphemy laws, which are not clearly defined and were further criminalized under the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s. The laws can carry the death penalty, though in Pakistan there has been an unofficial moratorium on the death sentence since 2008 and only one person has been executed.

The Lahore death sentence came during a period of extreme attacks on Christians and minorities. In 2010 the governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, visited Bibi in jail and shortly after was shot dead in Islamabad by his guard, who assumed that Taseer opposed the blasphemy law and supported Bibi.

In March 2011, the federal minister for minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti—who questioned the laws and was photographed with Bibi's husband—was also assassinated in Islamabad.

Contrary to some frenzied headlines, it is doubtful that Bibi faces execution anytime soon, if ever. Yet powerful extremist forces are still evident. This May human rights lawyer Rashid Rehman, who was defending a university lecturer accused of blasphemy, was shot dead in the city of Multan. And onetime

PHOTO BY EDEN PICTURES (VIA CREATIVE COMMONS)

assumptions that high courts would be more willing to overturn blasphemy judgments passed by lower courts are no longer held.

Zohra Yusuf, chair of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, told the *Monitor* that the “judiciary is under an atmosphere of fear when it comes to blasphemy cases. In this particular instance [October 17’s ruling on Bibi] the court was crowded with . . . [blasphemy] supporters [who] celebrated the verdict. It is very difficult to get a fair judgment, and it is very difficult to defend [blasphemy]. . . . Once they’re accused, their entire future is over.”

Joseph Francis, director of a prominent legal assistance group, says that courts have recently denied appeals to overturn death sentences.

“The court’s bent has changed,” he said. “In the past, Christians would expect that there would be some relief from the high court. . . . But there was a lot of pressure from clerics, and there were at least ten to 12 lawyers from the Khatm-e-Nabuwat movement [a hard-line right-wing pressure group] present in the court” on October 16.

Bibi herself, described in accounts as a laborer, remains behind bars. With the newest legal blow, her options are limited. But it is likely the justice system will move slowly. Her lawyers are expected to appeal to the Supreme Court of Pakistan. If her death sentence is upheld there, the next option is a mercy appeal to the president, Francis said.

Yusuf points out that Bibi’s safety in jail is of concern. Several prisoners accused or convicted of blasphemy have been attacked in jail, most recently in September, when a police officer shot and injured a man convicted of blasphemy and held at the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi.

“There have been no executions in Pakistan in cases of blasphemy, but quite a few [accused of] blasphemy . . . have been attacked in prison and some have been killed,” Yusuf said. “It’s not just a question of the law taking its course but a question of the atmosphere that is created around each case.” —Saba Imtiaz, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Methodists avoid trial of pastors in complaint over same-sex wedding

UNITED METHODISTS in Pennsylvania have agreed to resolve a complaint against three dozen clergy who blessed a same-sex wedding without taking the case to trial.

A complaint was filed against 36 United Methodist pastors who officiated at a November 9, 2013, wedding for two men at Arch Street United Methodist Church in Philadelphia. Philadelphia area bishop Peggy Johnson announced October 3 that the complaint had been resolved.

The resolution calls for the officiating clergy to acknowledge that they violated rules of the United Methodist Book of Discipline. In return, the complaint will be withdrawn.

“Though I may sympathize with the pastoral concerns of the respondents, it is unacceptable to disregard and disobey the Book of Discipline,” Johnson said. “I pledge that, in future cases where clergy within my jurisdiction officiate or host a same-gender ceremony, any complaints that I receive will be handled swiftly and with significant and appropriate consequences, which may include a trial, involuntary leave of absence without pay, or

other significant consequences, in accordance with the Discipline and in consultation with the Board of Ordained Ministry and the clergy session of the annual conference.”

The pastors officiating at the Philadelphia ceremony acted in solidarity with Frank Schaefer, who also faced a church trial in Johnson’s area. A church court reinstated Schaefer this summer after he was defrocked in November 2013 for officiating at his son’s gay wedding.

The Philadelphia ceremony was held before same-sex marriage was legalized in Pennsylvania earlier this year. United Methodist rules prohibit clergy from participating in and churches from hosting same-sex union ceremonies.

Against the backdrop of a campaign to “Stop the Church Trials,” some Methodist bishops have tried to sidestep court proceedings. Saying “church trials produce no winners,” a bishop in New York agreed to drop charges against Thomas Ogletree, a former dean of Yale Divinity School, who presided at his son’s gay wedding. —Sarah Pulliam Bailey, Religion News Service



SOLIDARITY: Clergy and faith leaders gather outside Arch Street United Methodist Church in Philadelphia in support of Richard Taylor and William Gatewood (at top of stairs in doorway) following their wedding in November 2013.

PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE, UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE

Preaching on mental illness often rare, survey finds

Protestant clergy rarely preach about mental illness to their congregations and only one-quarter of congregations have a plan in place to assist families of the mentally ill, a recent LifeWay Research survey found.

“When we look at what we know statistically—the prevalence of mental illness and the lack of preaching on the subject—I think that’s a disconnect,” said Ed Stetzer, executive director of the research firm, a ministry of LifeWay Christian Resources, which is an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention.

When it comes to clergy preaching about mental illness, researchers found the following:

- 66 percent mention it rarely, once a year or never
- 26 percent speak about it several times a year
- 4 percent mention it about once a month
- 3 percent talk about it several times a month

The survey among Protestant churches was funded by Colorado-based Focus on the Family and an anonymous donor whose family member suffered from schizophrenia. It included the perspectives of pastors, family members of the mentally ill, and churchgoers who have suffered from illnesses such as depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia.

Kay and Rick Warren, authors whose 27-year-old son, Matthew, suffered from mental illness and killed himself last year, commended the survey’s findings.

Kay Warren urged church leaders not only to preach about it but allow those struggling with mental illness to give testimonies to their congregations.

“Yes, preach a message, but put in front of your people those who are living with mental illness so they can share their stories and become human in that process,” she said in a late September conference call about the survey.

While 68 percent of pastors said their church maintains a list of local mental health resources for church members, just 28 percent of families are aware of

such resources. The survey also found that less than half of pastors—41 percent—said they had taken seminary courses on caring for the mentally ill.

Daniel Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools, said about 35 of the association’s 270 member schools offer master’s degrees in counseling or in marriage and family therapy. A recent study by Baylor University scholars found that of 70 seminaries with master of divinity programs, a majority offer elective courses on counseling but few students take them.

Meanwhile, almost a quarter of pastors surveyed—23 percent—said they had personally struggled with mental illness.

“I think it helps us to understand why some pastors have a sense of empathy, not just sympathy,” Stetzer said. “It surprised me in the sense that people were very forthright about it.”

LifeWay found that slightly more than a quarter of pastors—27 percent—said their church has a plan for supporting families with a mentally ill member.

The results are based on a survey conducted in May of 1,000 Protestant pastors. —Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service

Ukraine Baptists displaced, yet aid victims of conflict

Ukrainian Baptists report that about 5,500 of their members have been displaced from their homes. They are among the 100,000 people displaced as a result of conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Thousands of people are wounded, and some have died.

A letter from the All-Ukrainian Union of Associations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists to the Baptist World Alliance said that churches and church-related health-care centers are providing aid to the displaced and wounded.

“In these difficult circumstances, we are called to enhance the ministry for the sake of victory over evil and in every possible way, to help stop the war,” the union wrote.

Though there was a truce between pro-Russian militias and the Ukrainian army, fighting has destroyed bridges, supply lines, apartments, vehicles, and more.

An e-mail BWA received in early October, from an author unnamed for safety reasons, reported that “bloody confrontations leading to more deaths continue.”

Amid shelling and “tanks moving through the streets,” Christians “hold prayer meetings in the city parks and squares, establish centers of free psychological and medical assistance, host, feed, and dress the refugees.”

In early October, Ukraine’s parliament—whose speaker and chair, Oleksandr Turchynov, is a Baptist elder—hosted a meeting with church association leaders.

“Turchynov declared that the restoration of Ukraine is impossible without the restoration of people’s trust in government,” the author of the e-mail wrote, referring to special parliamentary elections in late October.

In July the head of the Ukrainian Baptist Union joined other Christian leaders in a statement reporting mistreatment and murder of pastors and ministers and the confiscation of churches. Protestants in Ukraine make up less than 1 percent of the population.

“The purposeful attacks of armed militants against evangelicals are accompanied by abductions, beatings, torture, threats of execution, pogroms at the places of prayer meetings, [and] captures of prayer houses, rehabilitation centers, and other places of worship,” they wrote in the statement.

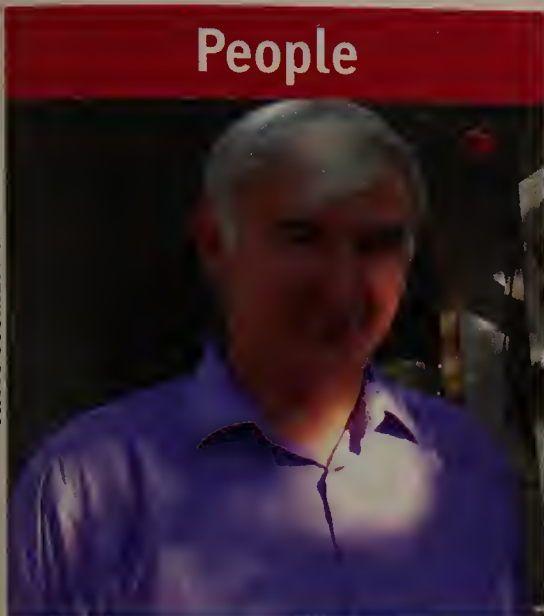
The *Baptist Times* in the United Kingdom reported in July “the killing of four Baptists who were dragged out of their church in Slavyansk in June and whose bodies were found in a mass grave earlier this month.”

Igor Bandura, vice president of the Ukrainian Baptist Union, addressed the Baptist World Alliance Annual Gathering in Izmir, Turkey, in July. He noted that Ukraine had 21 years of peace between independence from the Soviet Union and protests beginning in November 2013, when the government lessened its economic ties to the European Union in favor of closer connections to Russia.

“When the conflicts started, the first thing the churches did was we started to pray more,” he said, “begging God for help, for peace, for reconciliation.” —Baptist World Alliance

People

PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLEN SMITH



■ **Victor Ignatenkov**, a Russian Baptist pastor whose grandfather was killed for being a Christian, toured the United States recently to study church ministries. He also provided a first-person look at Russia's complex religious landscape after widespread persecution ended.

Under the Soviet regime, Christians could meet only for worship, but Ignatenkov, 59, said now he's free to lead whatever activities he wants as pastor of the Central Baptist Church in his hometown of Smolensk—a city situated between the capitals of Russia and Ukraine—and as regional bishop for the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. The union is a group of Protestant churches that began emerging in Russia about 150 years ago.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) International Peacemaker Program sponsored Ignatenkov's U.S. journey, which included stops in Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and Oklahoma.

Ignatenkov spoke to a political science class at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee, on October 6 before heading back to Russia with ministry ideas to share with his church.

Ignatenkov said he was buoyed by seeing large, bustling churches "with rooms for everything." He was most interested in examining churches' social ministries to homeless people and in prisons. He'd like to see cooperative efforts between governments and churches in Russia.

Ignatenkov, speaking through a

translator, hedged on discussing Russian president Vladimir Putin's close relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Putin helped resurrect the church, which the state once crushed. And though there is no state religion, the Orthodox Church receives preferential treatment.

"What's important to us, what we value, is that Putin as president holds a neutral stance," Ignatenkov said. "We do not experience governmental limitations because we are Baptist."

Not all church leaders can say the same. The government refuses to recognize some religions, which means religious freedoms are limited. A U.S. State Department report last year noted that some groups, including Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostal Christians, may be subject to arbitrary laws and denied access to places of worship or visas for visiting missionaries. Some face physical violence.

For denominations the government recognizes, the political reform movement that began in the waning days of the Soviet Union, *perestroika*, threw open doors to religious freedom. At first Russians packed cultural centers for special services and snatched up free Bibles, Ignatenkov said.

These days, people are indifferent—"probably because the quality of life is better," Ignatenkov said. "Everything that had been forbidden was of course very interesting. It's not forbidden, so of course it's not interesting now."

A Pew Research Center study of major religious groups in Russia based on data from 1991 to 2008 tracked a surge of interest in Protestant Christianity, Islam, and Roman Catholicism that then leveled off. The share of Russians who attended church once a month rose from 2 percent in 1991 to 9 percent in 1998, then dropped to 7 percent a decade later.

Seventy-two percent of Russian adults identified as Orthodox Christians in 2008, the survey found, but that didn't translate into church attendance.

Russia's constitution provides for religious freedom, but other laws, including one banning "extremism" and a new law against "offending the reli-

gious feelings of believers," restrict religious freedom, particularly for members of minority religious groups. —Heidi Hall, Religion News Service

■ Shortly before **Martin B. Copenhaver** was inaugurated as president of Andover Newton Theological School in early October, he told the school community in a letter that he had had an extramarital affair.

"This extramarital relationship—singular in my own experience and which ended before I was a candidate for president—is a source of great remorse," he wrote. "This relationship was not with anyone associated with Andover Newton or any church I have served, nor was it with anyone I have mentored. I fully realize that this does not in any way justify my actions, but I believe it is important for you to know."

Copenhaver told the *Boston Globe* that a trustee approached him about the affair during the summer. Copenhaver wrote to the school community that he had expressed to the board of trustees his willingness to resign his position, which he began in June, or to postpone his inauguration.

The board met in late September after conducting an investigation and consulting with the faculty. In a letter to the community that accompanied Copenhaver's, the board's executive committee said that the trustees "censured Martin, in writing, for having failed to disclose to the search committee" this information. Yet the board voted to keep him in his position and to hold the inauguration as planned.

"The trustees believed last fall that Martin was the right choice to lead our institution, and we continue to believe that today," the letter stated. "We owe it to our students to provide them a model for their own ministries that includes *both* holding those in positions of power accountable *and* responding out of the good news of God's unfailing love."



FILE PHOTO

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, November 16

Zephaniah 1:7, 12–18; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

FOR OUR 15th anniversary, my husband Chris and I cashed in our frequent flyer miles and traveled to Greece. On the fourth day, we drove into the surreal landscape of Meteora, with its sheer rocky towers rising from the valley floor. Soon we began to see what we had come for: old hermitages nestled in caves high in the cliffs, followed by tile-roofed monasteries impossibly perched atop stone pillars. Since the ninth century, Christian monks have come here to dedicate themselves to solitude and prayer in the austere loneliness of rocks and wind.

We had anticipated the landscape, and we came looking for the monasteries. We had even anticipated—sort of—the treacherous paths to the six monasteries currently open to visitors, though crossing a narrow swinging bridge hundreds of feet above the valley floor required some deep breathing from me and some deep patience from Chris.

What we did not expect were the vivid interiors that greeted us. When we entered the narthex of the tiny church at Ayios Nikolaos Anapaphsas, we immediately confronted a wall of frescoes showing the final judgment in fearsome detail: Christ in the top center, with those on his right going to glory and those on his left roasting in a river of fire or being devoured by sharp-toothed fish. We could hardly take our eyes from those tortured bodies, even as we passed through the door into the radiant sanctuary.

At each monastery we visited, the pattern was the same: at the church's entrance, a confrontation with gruesome death and destruction. Why should these scenes be the last thing you see before worship? A monk at the monastery of Varlaam explained that the frescoes are intended to provoke humility and self-reflection, so that the monks will continually pray to be on the right hand of Christ with the righteous, rather than burning in torment.

Perhaps, I thought. But isn't that a bit self-serving, praying for one's own safety while others suffer horrific torment? Doesn't a prayer for one's own righteousness too easily become confident *self-righteousness*?

Since our visit, I have come to see in my reaction a different form of self-righteousness. Who am I to judge the monks who pass in prayer day by day before the Day of Judgment, ever reminded that Christ is not only snuggly baby but also righteous Judge? Could my own reaction to the scenes of judgment betray a tendency to say in my heart, as the Zephaniah reading says, "The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm"?

The Meteora frescoes make it easy for outsiders to stand back and judge their theology as simplistic. Yet the "day of the Lord"

depicted there deserves our attention, and both Zephaniah and Paul call us to such attention. The prophet names torments that are all too real—wrath, destruction, ruin and devastation, battle cries and the leveling of cities. And it's not like such descriptions sound false or far away. Such images are all too evident: in Iraq as I write this, in Syria for more than four years, in countless cities around the world wracked by the fiery destruction of war or the slow decay of endemic poverty. Days of torment and destruction greet us anew every morning.

The problem is instead this: it is not at all clear that our days of destruction are truly the day of the Lord. These look all too much like the exercise of human powers, rather than God's judgment upon these powers.

What then is the link between God's judgment and the destruction we see? On the one hand, with the eyes of faith we do glimpse God's judgment on unrighteousness when unholy regimes are overthrown: Pharaoh, the Roman Empire, National Socialism in Germany, legalized racial segregation in the American South, apartheid in South Africa. Our faith is built on the confidence that divine righteousness has broken into human history in the past, and that it will ultimately prevail over all oppressive systems generated by power-mad humanity. Surely we hope for the coming of the Lord to bring justice, to "trample out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored," knowing that such trampling is God's judgment on judgment, God's wrath against human wrath. Surely, too, with the increasing gap between rich and poor in our country today, we lean forward in hope at Zephaniah's word that "neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them."

Yet this hope can be hard to sustain. The day of the Lord may be promised, but the inbreaking of God's justice is hard to spot. As I mused on this problem, I stumbled on Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians: "You, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day."

We are already children of the day. The day of the Lord is not just past or future, but the day in which we already live—the one in which Jesus has already come to expose our persistent patterns of violence and to lead us in a new way of living that refuses to participate in such destruction.

Maybe those Meteora monks have something right after all. Maybe pondering those vivid scenes of the day of the Lord can lead not to self-righteousness but to confidence that God will destroy every death-dealing demonic force in the world. Maybe I've forgotten who sits at the top of the frescoes: Christ the Judge, whose body still bears the scars of his torture, and who yet lives and beckons us even now to the way of radiant life beyond the shadows.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, November 23 / Reign of Christ Sunday

Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24; Ephesians 1:15–23;

Matthew 25:31–46

ONE RECENT MORNING, as I was preparing breakfast, my trusty radio companion Steve Inskip caught my attention with a story on the success rate of nonviolent civil resistance movements. Researchers Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan looked at more than 300 cases around the world from 1900 to 2006, concluding that nonviolent resistance movements are twice as likely to succeed in achieving social, political, and economic change as movements that resort to violence. *Twice as likely.*

To be sure, nonviolent movements do not always accomplish their purposes. Libya and Syria have witnessed the rise of violent resistance movements in the wake of nonviolent efforts in the past few years. This research shows, however, that nonviolent movements are, on the whole, much more effective at bringing about lasting change—as happened in India in 1948 and Tunisia in 2011. These movements need time, and organization, and people power—admittedly not an easy combination to achieve. With these in place, however, nonviolent movements work.

“Civil resistance does not succeed because it melts the hearts of dictators and secret police,” Chenoweth and Stephan write in *Foreign Affairs* (July/August):

It succeeds because it is more likely than armed struggle to attract a larger and more diverse base of participants and impose unsustainable costs on a regime. No single civil resistance campaign is the same, but the ones that work all have three things in common: they enjoy mass participation, they produce regime defections, and they employ flexible tactics.

Since hearing this story, what’s stuck with me is the testimony to the power of mass participation in protest against a powerful regime. This has also complicated my reading of the lectionary passages for the Sunday we now call “Reign of Christ” (formerly known as “Christ the King”). This is the day when we celebrate Christ in glory, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named,” according to Ephesians. On this day we extol Christ’s reign (or regime?) and praise the way that God has put “all things under his feet.”

Shouldn’t we be worried about such a portrayal of absolute power? Don’t we know how easy it is for Christ’s power to be

claimed by—and then confused with—very human political powers, serving corrupt and partisan interests?

I heard a story recently about a minister who presided over all the church session meetings wearing a crown. Perhaps this was intended as humor, but the effect was to claim power for herself—power that she exercised in dismissing several staff members and sowing discontent among members of the congregation. If Christ’s crown of glory in any way authorizes our own crowns of political power, perhaps it is time to rise up in resistance to all such celebrations of Christ as imperial ruler over all.

Matthew 25 and Ezekiel 34 are beginning to persuade me that there is another way. Matthew, like Ephesians, offers us a portrait of the glorified Christ on a throne in heaven with all the nations gathered before him. Mighty and unopposed, Christ sits on the throne, surrounded by angels, and sorts the sheep from the goats, assigning to each one her eternal fate of punishment or life. The crucial point (shared by Ezekiel’s vision) is that divine judgment is directed at the powerful who have mistreated the vulnerable and weak. The one who judges, the one whom God places in power (both David and Christ), is the one who identifies not with earthly rulers but with the lost and the least.

With whom does Christ the king identify? Or—to ask the question another way—whom does Christ *represent* in his exercise of power?

In Matthew 25, the answer is very clear: Christ identifies with the “least of these,” those who are “hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison.” The God of Jesus Christ does not identify with the big dogs—or the big sheep of Ezekiel. This God comes precisely to judge the oppressive powers of this world and to set up a new regime in their place. Real power, then—the power that Ephesians is talking about—is not the power of domination, but the power of resistance to “all rule and authority and power and dominion” that usually prevails in our world. Christ’s reign challenges the powers that we see displayed in political corruption, in despotic rule, in the ordinary tyranny of the privileged over those who scramble to make a living in our economy.

Christ, the one who “fills all in all,” may be precisely the one who empowers people with hope to stand against false rulers and unjust powers. Our resistance is not resistance to the reign of Christ but resistance *with and because of* the reign of Christ. Christ in glory promises that even when the prospects for peace and justice seem dim, God’s commitment to the “least of these” is sure and will finally prevail.

The author is Martha Moore-Keish, associate professor of theology at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia.

Dying wishes

by Jennifer L. Hollis

WHEN JEAN AND Paul Pearson married in 1991 they made a commitment to treat each of the six children in their blended family as their own. “There are no stepchildren,” says Jean. In their will the Pearsons listed all the children as equals. Since they were already thinking about end-of-life choices, they also completed a living will.

Twenty-one years later, Paul went to the emergency room for breathing problems. When he and Jean looked at the x-rays they could see that he had lung cancer. Paul received chemotherapy but knew early on that he was not going to recover. “The doctor said he could give us one or the other, quantity or quality,” says Jean. “We opted for quality of life.”

Paul was treated at Gundersen Health System in La Crosse, Wisconsin, where a remarkable 96 percent of patients have made a plan for their deaths. The advance care planning program at GHS, which is called Respecting Choices, provides training and certification to advance care planning facilitators who have conversations with patients and their families about their values and beliefs and help them document their choices for future medical care.

Not long after Paul’s diagnosis, the Pearsons reviewed Paul’s advance directive with a representative from Respecting Choices. Paul “did not want to go to a nursing home if that could be avoided. He did not want to be resuscitated,” said Jean. At the end of his life, Paul used oxygen to ease his breathing but took no other heroic measures.

Once Paul and Jean had a plan for Paul’s medical care, they made a bucket list. Paul wanted to continue to play pool, attend historical reenactments with Jean, and celebrate his birthday. At his party he gave diamond pendants to his daughters and to Jean, all made from a ring he had inherited from his father. He gave each of his sons a pocketknife from his collection.

Paul died in January 2013. Jean says the conversation about care was a gift and just as important as having a will.

“It’s not an easy conversation,” she says. “But once you sit down and talk about the pros and cons, and about how your choices will affect you and the rest of the family, a huge boulder is taken off your shoulders.”

Advance directives were developed in the 1970s to give patients more control in light of proliferating medical technologies. According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, only 35 percent of U.S. adults have put their wishes for end-of-life medical treatment in writing.

Respecting Choices was born out of a desire to improve patient care by understanding patients’ values and goals. It emerged in the 1980s, when Bernard Hammes, now Respecting Choices director, was a clinical ethicist for GHS. Hammes had held ethics consultations with the families of several patients with end-stage renal disease who had been disabled by strokes. The patients could not communicate and had no advance directives; as a result, their families did not know what the patients

**A remarkable 96 percent
of patients in La Crosse
have advance directives.**

wanted. Hammes talked with members of the Gundersen ethics committee about a new advance care planning program.

A March 1991 profile of the La Crosse community revealed that only 15 percent of residents had some form of advance care planning. Health-care leaders created a task force and set a goal: the number of critically ill patients admitted to the hospital with an advance care plan in their medical records would increase to 50 percent.

The two health systems in La Crosse decided to collaborate on a standardized approach to advance care planning. They created educational materials with a common name and logo. They engaged religious and civic leaders, attorneys, educators, and librarians in developing the program. And they provided training and ongoing education to more than 120 local advance directive educators.

In 1998 the first La Crosse Advance Directive Study was published. While it was not designed to be an evaluation of the education program, it seemed to have had a profound impact on the use of advance directives. In a review of 540 medical charts, the number of patients who had died with advance directives in place had increased from 15 to 85 percent. When the LCAD study was replicated ten years later, advance directive use had risen to 90 percent.

Jennifer L. Hollis is the author of Music at the End of Life: Easing the Pain and Preparing the Passage (Praeger Press). She lives in Somerville, Massachusetts.



PLANNING AHEAD: *The health system in La Crosse offers many opportunities to talk about end-of-life care.*

Today, GHS offers individualized advance care planning in three stages: First Steps ACP is for healthy adults 55 and over; Next Steps ACP is for patients with chronic, progressive illness; and Last Steps ACP is for frail elderly patients or those close to the last year of life.

Verona Lachman is an RN care coordinator in the GHS Palliative Care Department and an advance care planning facilitator. When she talks to patients about their choices, she is surprised by how open they are about their deepest concerns and about dying. Although the conversation can be emotional, patients are relieved to communicate their fears about being in pain or having difficulty breathing. Lachman explains treatment options and reassures patients that they are not going to suffer. She also helps them plan for modes of treatment, including being able to stay at home.

A few months ago Lachman went to a patient's home for a Next Steps conversation. The patient's spouse and five children were present. The patient had lung cancer and did not want to be put on a long-term ventilator. Lachman, who's been trained to help patients discuss disease-specific scenarios, explained that patients with lung cancer sometimes contract pneumonia, which might require a short-term ventilator during treatment. The patient decided that she would want a ventilator if she developed pneumonia.

When the patient did develop pneumonia, doctors thought she would not recover, but her family asked that she be put on a ventilator and she improved. When the patient saw Lachman

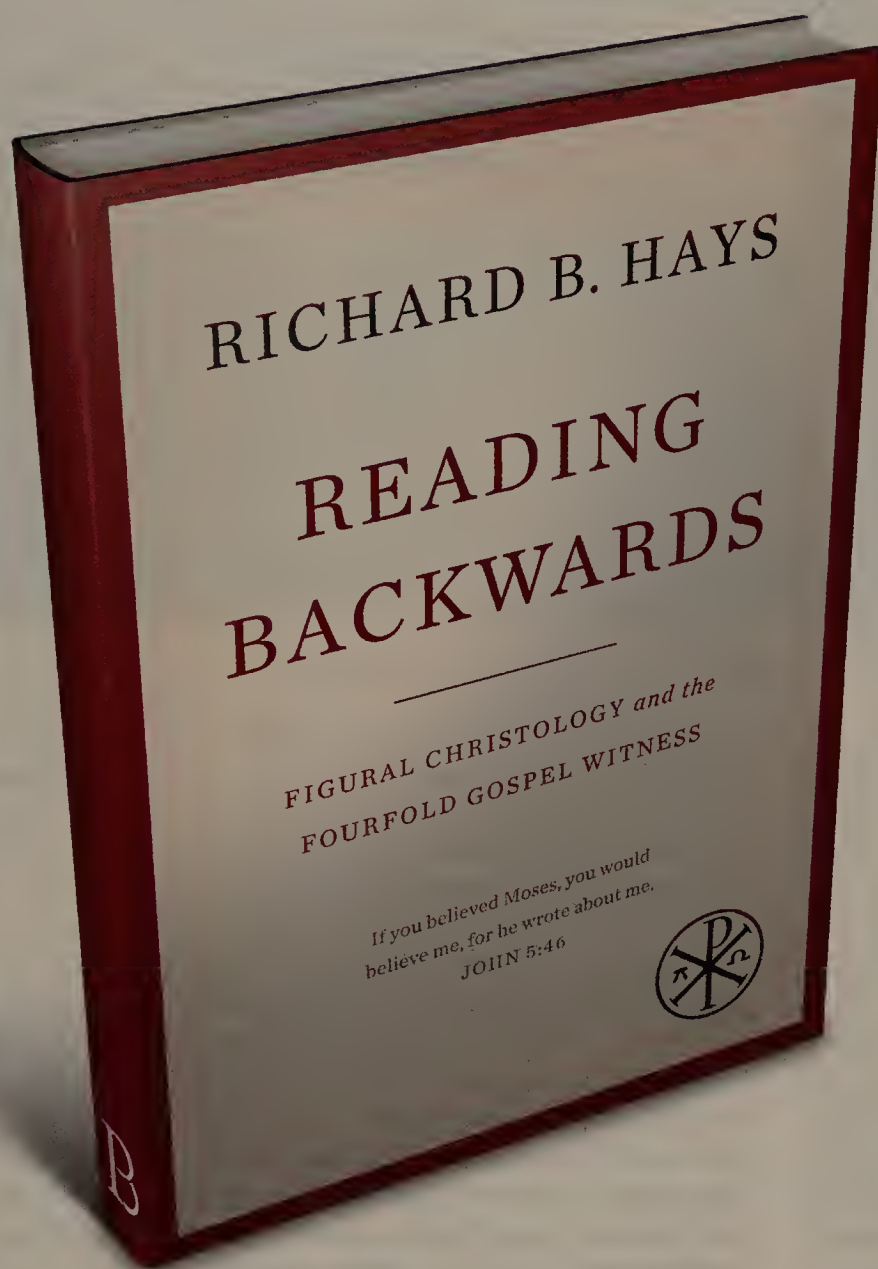
in a restaurant she hugged her. "Thank you for being my advocate," she said. Lachman describes this as an "aha!" moment for her. "People who hear about Next Steps conversations or advance directives think it's about dying. It's not about dying. It's about how you want to live."

Respecting Choices has succeeded because it multiplies the number of opportunities patients have to express their wishes and make them understood to relevant caregivers. According to a Respecting Choices training manual, "Building a Systems Approach to Advance Care Planning," the model has four key elements. First, the program includes a standardized advance directive document, a reliable referral system, and a record system that allows caregivers to view and update a patient's wishes from any site of care.

Second, Respecting Choices provides training and certification to advance care planning facilitators. Third, it engages members of the community so that patients receive information about advance care planning from trusted community members as well as from medical providers. Finally, Respecting Choices regularly measures how well the system honors patient wishes.

The advance care planning facilitators are at the heart of this system. Carol Berra is a nurse in the outpatient clinic at GHS and the coordinator for Next Steps facilitators. "I've always had a sense of the patient's right to choose," she says. "[They have] a right to information, and with that information the right to choose the kind of care they have." Berra discusses advance

by **RICHARD B. HAYS**



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care planning in the huddle of clinic staff and providers who check in with each other each day before patients arrive.

When a patient's situation makes it appropriate to initiate a Next Steps conversation Berra talks to the patient about the benefits. First, the conversation gives patients a chance to look at specific medical situations related to his or her disease. Second, it helps a health-care agent to become comfortable about making choices on the patient's behalf. Third, it helps the patient receive the kind of care the patient wants. "I always say, 'If we're not asking you, then how do we know what you want or don't want?'" said Berra.

"If we're not asking, how can we know what you want?"

Berra was part of a Next Steps conversation with Louise Butterfield and her eldest daughter. Butterfield had worked as a health unit coordinator for 37 years at GHS and had helped many patients complete advance directives. "We need to prepare our family, and we need to prepare ourselves, both mentally and spiritually," she said.

Butterfield had an advance directive that named her daughter as her health-care agent, but she had not had a Next Steps conversation until Berra suggested it. The conversation gave her an opportunity to think more carefully about her choices. "Advance care planning is not just for family members. It's for us too," she said. "We want to make sure our wishes are carried out."

Though it has brought advanced care planning to a remarkable number of people, Respecting Choices has encountered some resistance. Britt Welnetz, the organization's business development consultant, said that she is often asked whether a nonphysician facilitator can effectively discuss medical decisions. She explains that the standardized, patient-centered conversation leads to an overall level of patient satisfaction.

Others ask if the Respecting Choices model can work in a community that's more diverse than La Crosse. Research indicates that it can. The Respecting Choices program was implemented in a hospital in Milwaukee, and the use of advance directives among racial and ethnic minorities increased substantially from 25.8 percent to 38.4 percent. Research suggests that it's knowledge of advance directives, regardless of race and ethnicity, that leads to their use.

The advance care planning facilitator model has gained acceptance both nationally and internationally. Respect-

ing Choices has trained more than 10,000 facilitators, as well as nearly 600 instructors and nearly 30 faculty members who can implement system-wide changes. There are facilitators in 47 states in the United States, and Respecting Choices is the national standard of care in Singapore and Australia; the program is also the model for an \$8.5 million European Union study of advance-stage cancer patients and end-of-life care.

Advance care planning can transform families in unexpected ways. "I've had patients come back and say, 'After that conversation my kids come around more often,'" says Verona Lachman. Talking about end-of-life choices can help family members understand the disease process and realize the patient needs more help.

Advance care planning is most important when a loved one is called on to honor a patient's wishes. Lachman facilitated a conversation between a very active 90-year-old patient and his son. The patient mentioned a friend who'd had a stroke and was unable to speak and said that in the event of a stroke he did not want anything done.

Three years later the patient had a stroke. His son honored his wish to have only comfort care. He told Lachman, "Making that decision to let my dad go to comfort care was the hardest thing I've ever done." He added that the decision was easier because he knew what his dad's wishes were.

"He could no longer speak and live life as he had been living it," said his son. "He wouldn't want to live like that." **CC**

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Physician-ethicist Daniel Sulmasy

Can doctors help us die well?

*DANIEL SULMASY is an internist and an ethicist, and he was a Franciscan friar for 25 years. He continues to practice medicine while teaching at the medical school and the divinity school of the University of Chicago. He has focused much of his research on the ethics of end-of-life decision making. He has served on numerous governmental advisory committees and was appointed by President Obama to the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Problems. His books include *The Healer's Calling* (1997), *Safe Passage: A Global Spiritual Sourcebook for Care at the End of Life* (2013), and *Francis the Leper: Faith, Medicine, Theology, and Science* (2014).*

Has medicine gotten any better at facing up to death and allowing people to die a “good” death?

If you take a long view, the answer is very much yes. Around the middle of the last century, when medicine's technological prowess exploded, there was suddenly a lot that could be done to prolong a person's life. The instinct of physicians was to use that new power indiscriminately. And the attitudes of physicians were somewhat paternalistic. They didn't pay much attention to the preferences of a patient. In a humane but nonetheless paternalistic way, they looked to improve the medical condition and keep patients alive without much regard for the quality of life, the side effects, and the burdens associated with it.

There has been real improvement in attending to patients' desires at the end of life. The groundswell of the hospice movement was significant. The rise of palliative care as a medical specialty has been important. In general, we are better equipped, even from a technical point of view, to deal with patient symptoms than we have ever been in the history of humankind.

On the negative side, we are now in a schizophrenic position. There are still people who treat patients like they were treated in 1962, keeping them alive no matter what they say. On the other extreme has been a rise in the call for assisted suicide to be legalized. Orthogonal to both of those movements has been an increasing number of people and family members who demand treatments even when doctors say that treatment will be damaging or worthless. This has become the most common reason for ethics consultation today.

Have doctors gotten any better at having those conversations?

They have become more aware of the need for it. The conversations still happen too late, however—at the last minute—instead of prospectively engaging the family and the patient earlier. The time pressures on physicians have become more and more extreme. On the surface, it looks like the default mode—just keep on treating—is the most efficient. You don't have to spend half an hour talking with the family about these weighty issues. You do your rounds in ten minutes, write the order, and move on.

There is economic pressure on physicians to see more patients and spend less time with each. The “death panel” controversy that erupted a couple of years ago arose because of the suggestion that there ought to be a billing code that a doctor could use to charge for such a conversation. This provision would at least have removed the economic barrier to such a conversation.

“Doctors are aware of the need for end-of-life conversations, but they still happen too late.”

I don't think, however, that ignoring these conversations is really time efficient. A doctor might say, “I don't have half an hour to sit with a patient,” but then spend four weeks visiting the patient and attending to an agonizing and protracted death that might have happened more humanely if he had simply sat down with the patient for a conversation.

How did these issues become important to you?

In medical school I made a diagnosis that a woman with breast cancer had a metastatic tumor pressing on her spinal cord. I was very proud that I had ordered the test to confirm this. I was in the patient's room when a neurologist walked in in his long white coat with his trailing entourage of medical students and residents in their shorter white coats. He walked up to the woman and said, “Lady, you've got a big, fat tumor stuck to your spinal cord. We are going to have to give you

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



some radiation so you won't get paralyzed, OK?" And then he walked out of the room.

That left me, the most junior person, with a frightened, tearful woman, trying to shore up the mess that had been created by insensitive communication. Experiences like that led me to think about dedicating my life to making medicine better.

I also had some positive experiences that taught me that caring for patients at the end of life can be incredibly rewarding. For me, it is spiritual. If I walk into the room of a patient who is dying in faith, in hope, and in love, they are teaching me what it means to be human. I feel I need to take my shoes off when I enter the room of a person like that. It is that holy.

How do you combine good medical care, medical ethics, and pastoral care?

Medical ethics and pastoral care are not separate. A few years ago, I had a patient who was comatose and clearly dying. He was an African-American man whose wife was not willing to authorize withdrawal of care. This was a dilemma for the staff, who felt that they were not helping the patient.

I did the ethics consultation. I spoke to the patient's wife. I routinely ask about people's faith commitments and sources of support. She revealed that she was a faithful, churchgoing Baptist. I asked if she wanted her pastor to be part of the ethics consultation. She said yes.

Usually in the midst of an ethics consult we'll ask the family to leave the room so we can discuss our recommendation. This pastor stepped up and said at that point, "I would like to ask all of you to leave the room. Mrs. Jones and I are going to sit here and pray about this and talk it over." He brought us back in when they were done. Mrs. Jones said, "I think God is calling my husband home. It's OK for you to stop all these treatments."

An ethics committee that is attuned to the pastoral care side of things and can work with the chaplains in the hospital or the patient's own clergy is going to do a much better, more holistic job than if one thinks of these as separate worlds.

In the comment section of a recent piece in the *New York Times* on end-of-life care, one commenter wrote, "Surely, I have the right to determine what happens when I become terminally ill." It is not a decision to be made by the "center for medical ethics." How would you respond to this?

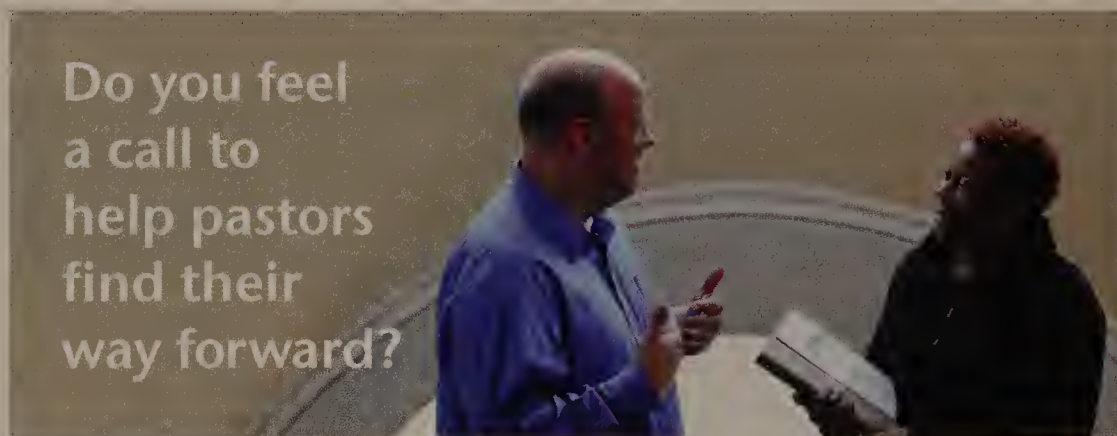
Sometimes people are fixated on control. That may reflect a bad experience that they have had or that a family member has had. I approach the issue

sideways and say, "Tell me more about your experience that has led you to think this." The philosophical problem for many people—maybe Americans especially—is a desire for control at the end of life. And that control is really illusory.

I was on a radio talk show once where a man said, "I need to have assisted suicide as an option. They are giving me all of this chemotherapy, and it is making me sick. I have a port in my chest that is getting infected. I am in pain all of the time." He was dumbfounded when I said, "Why are you still getting chemotherapy? Why do you have that port in your chest? We can stop all of those things. We can allow you to die a natural death. We can use hospice and palliative care. We don't have to ratify the sense that you as an embodied person have lost value to the point where your death is an aim of our action. We can accept your death, but we don't have to cause it."

This is an odd cultural moment. Both treatment at all costs and forced death as an "option" are happening with equal vigor in our society right now. This is the schizophrenia I was talking about. Aristotle's doctrine of the mean could be useful here and help us find a less destructive path.

Five states now allow some form of "assisted dying" or "assisted suicide." What lessons have been learned from the experience of doctors and ethicists in those states about death and dying?



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Very few of the people who ask for assisted suicide do so because they have uncontrollable pain or other symptoms. It is more about their perception of being a burden on others, about a sense of a loss of control, about not feeling that they are at their best. They perceive themselves as being looked upon in ways they don't want to be looked upon.

In the Netherlands, one sees "tiredness of life" given as a reason that people request assisted suicide. It is not because of

"An increasing number of people demand treatment even when doctors advise against it."

excruciating pain that can't be controlled any other way. Those are often the cases that are put forward in the media as reasons for assisted suicide, but in practice that doesn't play as big a part as one might think.

When you look at the data, there have been slight increases in the number of people asking for assisted suicide—not huge leaps, at least in the United States. But in the Netherlands, which is decades "ahead" of the United States on this issue, you see real evidence of a slippery slope. Three

percent of all deaths there are now caused by euthanasia or assisted suicide.

At first, euthanasia was illegal but not prosecuted. Next it became voluntary—you could ask for it. Then the Dutch tolerated nonvoluntary euthanasia, in which a person is not able to say whether they want it or not, but others can decide that it is in their best interest.

People who are severely demented are being euthanized—people who never said they wanted that. Children with birth defects are regularly being euthanized. Psychiatric indications are now springing up: "My depression is too much for me." In one case in Belgium, a botched sex-change operation was the cause of a person saying that he wanted to end his life.

I think that it is too early to tell what will happen in the United States, but if you look to what is happening in Europe, you see where this might be going.

Are we headed the same direction?

There is more resistance in the United States, partly because we are a more religious country. And I think that there has been more resistance from physicians in the United States and the United Kingdom. I am coauthor of the position statement of the American College of Physicians, which opposes assisted suicide and euthanasia. The American Medical Association is opposed as well.

There is a debate here, certainly. There is an organized and well-funded movement that is seeking legalization of assisted suicide. While there are five states where such legislation has passed, there have been many more states where proposals for such laws have failed.

Does the distinction between allowing someone to die and taking an overt action to produce a death still mark a bright line for doctors and ethicists? Or does the line get blurred in practice?

By and large, every clinician senses the difference. Ethicists have done more to blur the line than clinicians.

In killing, I create a new lethal, pathophysiological state with the specific intention of having the patient die. The patient has no cyanide in their system, and I inject cyanide with the specific intention of causing their death.

Allowing to die means that I refrain from initiating a medical intervention or I remove a treatment which is preventing the progression of death due to a preexisting lethal pathophysiological condition.

The paradigmatic example in this country of allowing to die was the removal of the ventilator of Karen Ann Quinlan. Her family went to court to get




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her ventilator removed because they thought it was needlessly prolonging her life. When the ventilator was stopped, they had fulfilled their intention. But she continued breathing. The parents didn't say, "Oh, we failed. Let's get out a pillow and smother her." She died years later. What matters in the distinction between killing and allowing to die is intention—whether the intention is to end the treatment or end the patient.

Technology has not blurred the distinction, but it has increased the burden of decision making on patients and their loved ones at the end of life. When there was no ventilator, you didn't have to think about whether to remove it. The more treatments we have, the more decisions we have to make about what is more burdensome than beneficial. That has become a burden for patients, families, and physicians. But the distinction remains.

Many of the recommendations of a recent report by the Institute of Medicine are directed at reducing costs. The claim is that reducing costs can lead to better care at the end of life, not worse. With how much skepticism should we view this claim? Where is the line between reducing costs and having excellent care?

This is the most troubling part of the report. I don't think we are going to get a lot of cost savings by improving care at the end of life. We might get some, but if so, that should be a happy side effect. The aim should be providing better care. The more people who are aware that they have the option not to pursue the many life-prolonging treatments, then the more who may decide not to do so, and I suppose that is a cost savings. But if it wound up that it cost more and that we had to pour more resources into hospice because of our aging population, that would still be a good thing, even if expensive.

We do a lot of unnecessary testing and treatment in this country, and not all of it at the end of life. I often ask students, "Why are you ordering that panel of 25 different blood tests for that healthy 20-year-old who came in for a physical?" "Well, I want to get a baseline." "A baseline for what?" We are often not clear about what we are seeking. But the motive needs to be better care.

What is better care at the end of life?

We often so glorify individual choice that we think if we give a patient anything he or she wants, that is "good care." I don't think that is the case. I do think there is an awful lot of unnecessary suffering for patients at the end of life, and patients ought to be enabled to face their own finitude. Doctors need to be honest enough with patients to allow them to do that. As Paul Ramsey once said, "The purpose of medicine is not to relieve the

human condition of the human condition." Sometimes we seem to suggest to patients that we can.

If patients are more aware of the possibility of symptom control, if we create more space for conversation about meaning, value, and relationship, which are pastoral and spiritual questions that arise inevitably in care of the dying, then I think we will see the peaceable use of medical technology. Teams of social workers and chaplains can help provide the kind of environment in which patients can have less pain and more space to deal with their own mortality—their hopes and fears. That for me means better care at the end of life.

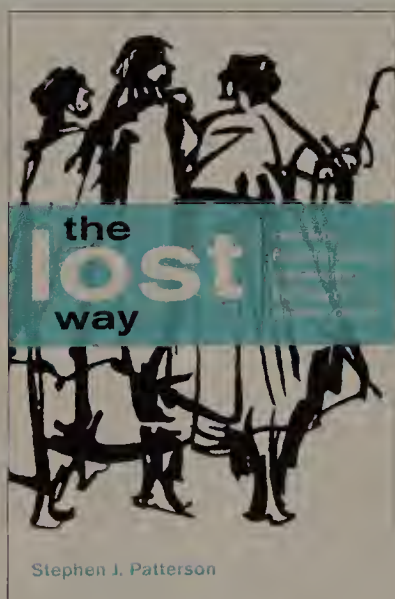
What are the primary spiritual questions at the end of life?

At the end of life, the primary spiritual questions are questions about meaning, value, and relationship. Questions about meaning echo down the centuries: Why me? Why my daughter? Can I make sense of my suffering? Questions of value arise: patients begin to question their own value. They are no longer productive in a society that overvalues productivity. They become disfigured in a society that overvalues image and youthfulness. And it is uncanny the way brokenness in body reminds patients of the brokenness in their relationships and their need for reconciliation. Sometimes these are the obvious questions to everyone except the doctors, who are worried about what the potassium level is.

CC

— Amy Frykholm

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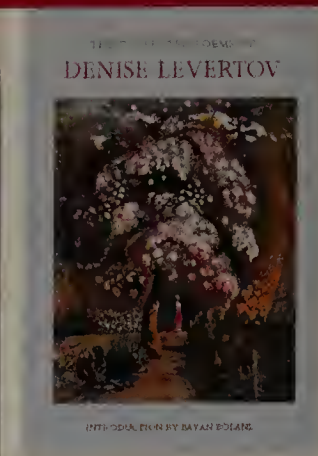
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The poet and politics

by Jeff Gundy



WRITING IN AN effortless vernacular style, displaying deep political engagements and a mystical streak both dreamy and grounded in the physical world, Denise Levertov (1923–1997) was both a key American poet of the late 20th century and a stubborn eccentric. Levertov stood always a little apart, never at ease for long in any school or group, more than once breaking abruptly with even her closest poetic friends and mentors. With deep spiritual traditions from both sides of her family, she pursued religious issues and themes throughout her large body of work, especially after her late and somewhat uneasy conversion to Catholicism. As two new biographies and a massive collection of her poems show, this vivid, restless, and distinctive poet's work and life remain relevant and rewarding.

Levertov was something of a prodigy, and a bold one. At age 12 she sent T. S. Eliot a letter and some poems and received an encouraging reply. Mainly educated at home in England, she served as a nurse during World War II. After the war she traveled in Europe. In Paris she met American writer and activist Mitchell Goodman; they married quickly and moved to the United States in 1948, when Levertov was pregnant with their only child, Nikolai. Levertov published her first book, *The Double Image* (1946), while still in her early twenties. (She changed the spelling of her name in the 1950s to distinguish herself from her sister Olga, also a published poet.)

The move to America was important to her writing. She soon left behind the rather sticky neo-Romantic style of her early poems ("you will listen no more, now, to the sounding sea"). Reading and meeting William Carlos Williams, Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan, and other American poets freshened her language and expanded her sense of what poems might be and do. But throughout her career Levertov maintained an essentially Romantic sensibility, a fascination with the depth, beauty, and anguish of the world, and the conviction that the poet's vocation was to explore and evoke those mysteries through the medium of language.

These themes fit with her conscious fidelity to mystics on both sides of her family. Her father, Paul Levertoff, a Russian Jew who converted to Christianity and became a scholar and writer, was descended from a founder of Chabad Hasidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman. Her Welsh mother, Beatrice Spooner-Jones, numbered the mystic tailor Angell Jones of Mold among her "Illustrious Ancestors." In an early poem with that title,

Denise Levertov: A Poet's Life

By Dana Greene

University of Illinois Press, 328 pp., \$35.00

A Poet's Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov

By Donna Krolik Hollenberg

University of California Press, 532 pp., \$44.95

The Collected Poems of Denise Levertov

Edited and annotated by Paul A. Lacey and Anne Dewey, with an introduction by Eavan Boland

New Directions, 1046 pp., \$49.95

Levertov speaks of "thinking some line still taut between me and them" (Zalman and Jones), and of writing "poems direct as what the birds said, / hard as a floor, sound as a bench, / mysterious as the silence when the tailor / would pause with his needle in the air."

Her biographers Dana Greene and Donna Krolik Hollen-

Levertov speaks frankly of female desire in ways that shocked some readers.

berg both had free access to the Levertov papers housed at Stanford, and both did extensive interviews and other research as well. They agree that Levertov was loyal to her family but that her relations with her parents and her gifted but troubled older sister Olga were often strained and difficult. Denise was a late child, and her father often seemed distant and preoccupied with his work.

She also did not share her mother's earnest, conventional Christian views or her sexual prudery (Greene writes that for Beatrice Levertoff "the spirit was good and the body was a prison"). Soon after her mother moved to Mexico in the 1950s to live near the Levertovs, Denise, Mitch, and Nikolai moved

Jeff Gundy is the author of *Somewhere Near Defiance* (poems) and *Songs from an Empty Cage* (essays). He teaches at Bluffton University in Ohio.

back to the United States, leaving Beatrice to live with a friendly family in Oaxaca for the rest of her life.

In her journals Levertov detailed various affairs before, during, and after her marriage and wrote of her desire (often unfulfilled) to be central to someone's life. Though she refused to call herself a feminist, her poetry speaks frankly of female desire in ways that shocked some readers. In 1964 she opened *O Taste and See* with the still provocative, beautifully earthy "Song for Ishtar":

The moon is a sow
and grunts in my throat
Her great shining shines through me
so the mud of my hollow gleams
and breaks in silver bubbles

She is a sow
and I a pig and a poet

When she opens her white
lips to devour me I bite back
and laughter rocks the moon

In the black of desire
we rock and grunt, grunt and
shine

This is no lesbian anthem, though it might be read that way. Though a number of her close friends were gay men, Levertov seems to have always been uneasy about same-sex relationships between women. She criticized fellow poet Adrienne Rich, for example, for connecting feminism too closely to lesbianism, badly straining what had been a close friendship. And while Levertov celebrated physical desire in many poems, she also wrote freely of the difficulty of intimate relationships. In "The Ache of Marriage," which follows closely upon "Song for Ishtar":

We look for communion
and are turned away, beloved,
each and each

It is leviathan and we
in its belly
looking for joy, some joy
not to be known outside it

two by two in the ark of
the ache of it.

Her marriage to Goodman lasted more than 20 years, but with frequent strains and periods spent living apart. Goodman published a modestly successful novel and worked as a travel writer but often felt himself a failure compared to his wife. And Levertov

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admitted that she expected a great deal of others. She could be formidable “to the point of intransigence,” as Hollenberg puts it, and eventually came to regret “the ‘pride and hard-heartedness’ that too often over the years had driven people away.”

Hollenberg’s biography, nearly twice as long as Greene’s, curiously proclaims itself to be “the first full-length biography” of Levertov, despite appearing a year after Greene’s. It does offer much more detail on the poet’s personal relationships and reads her poetry in greater depth and with greater sympathy for her sometimes radical views. Hollenberg is particularly insightful on the “Olga Poems,” a six-part sequence written shortly after Olga’s death in 1964. Only in the last years of her life had the sisters begun to communicate after a long estrangement.

In the poems, Hollenberg argues, Levertov breaks through to a new acceptance of the complexity of Olga’s life in “the paradoxical realization that Olga had been both a nightmarish muse of undeniable sorrow (‘Black one, incubus’) and a shining beacon of compassion (‘a white candle’).”

In the 1960s Levertov’s deep opposition to the Vietnam War and to larger systems of oppression grew steadily, and her poems and public appearances became increasingly devoted to the cause. Written at the height of the war, “Life at War” and “What Were They Like?” remain among the best-known antiwar poems of the era. Levertov threw herself into the cause with great energy, and at some cost to her reputation and relationships.

I’ve been held up

in traffic, like everyone, window down,
exhaust and summer air wrinkling
above I-94, crawling toward the Loop

by thrift stores anywhere along the way, she
inside hunting cast-off cast iron, I
at rest in a parking-lot novel

because of a worn-out hip joint, its new
titanium step-twin taking two
years to find the other’s stride

in love and loss, her breast cancer, my
tears, her pale face vulnerable amid
surgeons, percentages, fear

like the feel of a gun barrel back of my skull,
one long-ago college night, masked
men demanding money, drugs—all

of which, this warming March morning,
makes each step along this sunlit side-
walk light, light, sweet Godlit light

Mark Hiskes

Perhaps the biggest loss was the connection with the San Francisco poet Robert Duncan, who had been her close friend and mentor. Duncan opposed the war himself but came to see Levertov’s activism as excessive. “The poet’s role is not to oppose evil, but to imagine it,” he wrote, accusing her of taking on the role of Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction.

The charge that Levertov “went too far” in opposing the war remains a point of contention today. Greene seems to agree, pointing out that in the preface of *To Stay Alive* (1971), Levertov seems to abandon nonviolence when she quotes Gandhi’s statement that it is better to “cultivate the art of killing and being killed rather than in a cowardly manner to flee from danger” and claims that the “guardians of life” include “all who struggle, violently if need be, to pull down this obscene system before it destroys all life on earth.”

After much searching, Levertov joined a Catholic congregation.

As Hollenberg documents in considerable detail, however, the poems in *To Stay Alive*, especially the long sequence “Staying Alive,” hardly advocate overthrowing “the System” with guns and bombs. Instead, they reveal Levertov’s anguished struggle to discover human, spiritual, and political resources that might make real social change—and real peace—possible. Norman Morrison and Alice Hertz, who burned themselves to death in protest, are celebrated, but uneasily, and “heroes” who take up weapons themselves are conspicuously lacking.

Those who give her the most hope, Levertov suggests, are not violent revolutionaries but veteran pacifists like A. J. Muste, who “worked through a long life to make from outrage / islands of compassion others could build on.” Though she writes, in a moment of particular passion, that “there comes a time when only anger / is love,” this outburst is countered with a rueful admission a few pages later: “I am not Kali, I can’t sustain for a day / that anger. . . . I wrote it, but know such love / only in flashes.” For all her calls for revolution, clearly the transformation Levertov dreams of is of consciousness and social structures, not merely a change of one militarized set of oppressors for another.

“Staying Alive” and a good deal of Levertov’s most political writing now seems diffuse, hasty, over- and underwritten by turns; the stress and strain of those turbulent times are everywhere. But the haunting charge of poems such as “What Were They Like?” remains:

There is an echo yet
of their speech which was like a song.
It was reported their singing resembled
the flight of moths in moonlight.
Who can say? It is silent now.

Some critics find such admiring attention to those declared to be enemies of the state to be sentimental. Perhaps. It can also be

seen as a necessary act of resistance to the dehumanizing rhetoric of war, famously expressed in General William Westmoreland's callous claim, recorded in the 1974 documentary *Hearts and Minds*, that "Life is cheap in the Orient." Is the cresting of Levertov's anger in the early 1970s a harsh overreaction or a frustrated but plausible response to the events of the time and the frustrating difficulty of actually changing the world?

Levertov herself eloquently resisted the argument that poets should stay out of politics. In her 1967 essay "The Poet in the World," Levertov says that writing can and should include political action, along with the need "to take personal and active responsibility for his words, whatever they are, and to acknowledge their potential influence on the lives of others" (italics in original). As early as 1970, Levertov came to believe that opposition to the Vietnam War was only one facet of a much larger struggle against racism, economic oppression, and environmental destruction. (Martin Luther King Jr. came to a similar conclusion from a different starting point; see his 1967 speech "Beyond Vietnam," partly written by the recently deceased Vincent Harding.)

In a late essay Levertov further argued that the poetry of protest must be supplemented by "a poetry of preparation for peace," recognizing that "we and all things are all truly part . . . of one living organism." Nearly half a century after she wrote in "Life at War" that "nothing we do has the quickness, the sureness, / the deep intelligence living at peace would have," it seems that she was right on all counts. The world is still waiting for the transformation of which she and those of like mind dreamed and dream, and the failure of the 1960s revolution will not be easily forgiven by those who must live in the world we are leaving to them.

Steeped as she was in the language of psalms, parables, and hymns, Levertov was always a religious poet, though for much of her life she resisted an overt identification with any strand of organized religion. Her fascination with the numinous mysteries of nature runs through all her work, even when, as in the early "Earth Psalm," it takes the form of dismissing the divine: "I could replace / God for awhile, that old ring of candles, / that owl's wing brushing the dew / off my grass hair." The poem calls for the "salutation of / somber beauty in what is mortal," and imagines a small-god who

has wit
to wreath all words, who laughs
wrapped in sad pelt and without hope
of heaven,
who makes a music turns the heads
of all beasts
as mine turns, dream-hill grass
standing on end at echo even.

This turn to immanence, familiar to many readers of contemporary poetry, is at least arguably not a rejection of divinity but a reflection of how the divine inhabits the world—closer to the sort of "spiritual but not religious" contemporary turn that so troubles some current defenders of organized churches.

Levertov was hardly one of those self-indulgent finders of God in sunsets. As a teen in England she handed out copies of the *Daily Worker* at her sister Olga's request, and we have already seen her deep and ongoing engagement with social issues. Later in her life she became increasingly attracted to Christian churches. In the early 1980s she began attending services in Boston, Palo Alto, and London, trying out a variety of Anglican, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Catholic congregations.

While searching for a community that offered both "good music, art, and intelligent sermons" and "an active commitment to social justice," she devoted more and more of her poetic energy to religious subjects as well. She composed the text for an oratorio about the martyred Salvadoran archbishop Óscar Romero, and in 1984 published *Oblique Prayers*, which includes her most explicitly religious poems yet.

Levertov's faith, though it remained tentative and unconventional, came to play a large part in her life, and after a long period of testing and questioning she formally joined a Catholic congregation in Seattle in 1990. (Dana Greene, her-

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self a practicing Catholic, traces the details of Levertov's pilgrimage with sympathy and subtlety.) After her conversion Levertov engaged seriously with a number of religious mentors, including the Franciscan Murray Bodo, and wrote a series of poems about the English mystic Julian of Norwich. Later books like *Evening Train* became ever more directly religious. While her desire for community was partially met within the Catholic Church, she was never entirely comfortable within its patriarchal, hierarchical structure, nor did she find her religious questions and doubts settled or neatly solved.

Still, her later poems include many fragile but intense moments of presence, including these lovely lines from "The Spirits Appeased":

This is the way
you have spoken to me, the way—startled—
I find I have heard you. When I need it,
a book or a slip of paper
appears in my hand, inscribed by yours; messages
waiting on cellar shelves, in forgotten boxes
until I would listen.

Your spirits relax;
now she is looking, you say to each other,
now she begins to see.

I was in the audience for Levertov's keynote address at the Mennonite/s Writing in the U.S. conference at Goshen College in 1997 but spoke to her only briefly. I have regretted this ever since, because it was her last public lecture; she died of cancer a few months later. In her address, published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, she spoke of poets and writers like herself as "airplants," finding their identity in language rather than in the "rooted" connection to a single place that poets like William Carlos Williams felt. Indeed, Levertov may have been a pilgrim both in her life and in her work, never entirely settled or at home. Perhaps this was the price she paid for the clarity, depth, and subtle boldness of her poems.

Both Greene and Hollenberg make worthy guides to this essential poet's sometimes turbulent but well-spent life. (Read Greene for her economy and focus on Levertov's faith journey, Hollenberg for more intricate explorations of Levertov's psyche and poetry.) No doubt only her most ardent fans will closely read all 1,000-plus pages of her *Collected Poems*; some poems are slack or repetitive. No poet writes always at her highest level.

Still, something nourishing awaits on almost every page, including many remarkable but little-known poems, like "Psalm Fragments (Schnittke String Trio)," from late in her life:

Lord, I curl in Thy grey
gossamer hammock

that swings by one
elastic thread to thin
twigs that could, that should
break but don't.

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by M. Craig Barnes

Good dog, bad dog

THIS YEAR our seminary community includes two adorable black Labrador retrievers. They are guide dogs that quietly and tirelessly help students with vision disabilities navigate our curbs, steps, and a busy road that runs through campus. They go with the students to classes, the cafeteria, the library—and sometimes they roll over to scratch their backs on the grassy quad as their students sit talking with others.

The dogs also come to chapel and lie down next to each other under the first pew. They're long-legged, so they sprawl out a bit in front of the pew. Interestingly, they always face the pulpit.

I preach in this chapel every Monday. I'm very grateful that the dogs make it possible for two of our students to attend seminary and participate in the full life of our community. But it's an interesting experience to look down from the pulpit, halfway through the sermon's best sentence that was oh so carefully constructed, and see a couple of tired dogs looking up at me.

Even as I continue to preach I wonder what they're thinking. The rational side of my brain believes that the dogs are the only ones hoping that the sermon will go long so they can keep their heads on the floor for a few more minutes. But the other side of the preacher brain can't resist a metaphor.

These dogs have been trained not to chase squirrels, Frisbees, or other dogs. They spend most of their day in rigid leather harnesses. There's even a message on the blue wraps around their torsos that says, "I'm working. Don't pet me." I understand—petting is distracting to the dog and dangerous to the person it is helping. And I'm sure the students they serve spend plenty of time scratching their dogs behind their ears.

But when the dogs come to worship they lie on the floor right in front of the pulpit as an obvious depiction of what we all feel.

By the time we get to church we've been in the harness a long time. Our squirrel-chasing days were long ago trained out of us, and when we see kids throwing a Frisbee the best we can do is to smile and remember. Burdened by the relentless demands of the workplace, the needs of small children, struggles with finances, broken relationships, and anxieties about bodies that don't work as well as they once did, we're so dog-tired when we trudge into worship that we're just looking up for a break.

Maybe something—a hymn, anthem, even the sermon—will feel like God's tender hand touching our drooping heads. Maybe. But the rest of our week has trained us not to expect it. "I'm working. Don't pet me."

What we expect from worship is that we'll be told to keep working. We'll confess the things we've done and left undone.

The preacher will tell us is that the world is broken and Jesus is expecting us to fix it. And there will be a minute for mission that tries to enlist our time and money.

Most of the people who come to church these days already have a pretty clear sense of their ethical and moral responsibilities. We're well trained and know what we ought to do. There is little gospel in telling us we're not doing enough. But that's the message the church keeps giving.

I am struck by how many preachers keep finding ways to give the bad-dog sermon, in both conservative and progressive congregations. The pastor stands in the pulpit and scolds the world for being a mess, and the congregation for allowing this mess to continue. Sometimes the scolding is about the mess they've made of their own lives or the mess they left in the church. "Bad dog!" the preacher barks, "Take that outside." What is even more amazing is how many good people are addicted to the bad-dog sermon. They sit in the pews looking like guilty puppies thinking, "You're right. I haven't been good

Preachers keep finding ways to scold the world.

enough. I'll be back next week to hear this again." The irony is that the best people are the ones most aware of their failures.

I don't think those of us in church are all that confused about being bad dogs. What we don't know is what to do about it.

This is why worship has to offer the grace of God woven through the whole liturgy. Maybe the threads of mercy will glisten through the amazing words of the declaration of pardon, the tender music of the choral anthem, the sacrament that offers a taste of grace, or come from a preacher who long ago gave up scolding. Maybe it will come when the congregation watches the pastor place a child on her lap during the children's sermon.

Our souls are literally dying to hear a message that can get our drooping heads off the floor. We're desperate for the extraordinary news that we are loved, forgiven, and belong in the family of God. And somehow the blessed manna comes along the way during the hour in church. We gobble it down.

Only then can we get off the floor and leave worship excited about our mission to guide others to such amazing grace.

M. Craig Barnes is president of Princeton Theological Seminary.

IN Review

Saying no

by Robert Westbrook

Bruce Dancis and I were graduate students together at Stanford University in the mid-1970s. We were not particularly close, but we did play together on a pretty good intramural basketball team with others in the history department. Bruce initially had some difficulty adapting to the team's offense. He joked that he was used to playing with other socialists in Berkeley, where everyone felt obligated to pass the ball and hence no one ever took a shot.

Bruce was self-effacing off the basketball court as well. I remember him as keenly intelligent, soft-spoken, and possessed of a quiet dignity. At the time I had no idea that before he arrived at Stanford, he had been an antiwar activist of the first rank at Cornell University and that he had spent 19 months in federal prison for draft resistance. *Resister* is Bruce's memoir of those years, and it too is keenly intelligent, soft-spoken, and possessed of a quiet dignity.

Dancis came by his defining moral and political convictions early in life. His parents were socialists and his father was a significant figure in the American Socialist Party and the War Resisters League in the 1930s and 1940s. He was a conscientious objector in World War II. By the time Bruce was born in 1948, his parents' political activism had waned considerably, and their anticommunism waxed as their anticapitalism waned. Yet they remained firmly on the left, and their support for their son never flagged, despite sometimes sharp political disagreements.

Raised in the Bronx, Dancis went regularly to the Sunday school of the Ethical Culture Society, the church of choice for secular humanists like his par-

ents, and he spent his summers at Buck's Rock Work Camp in Connecticut and at Three Arrows Cooperative Society in Putnam County, north of New York City, at which longtime Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas was a regular visitor. During these summers he began a lifelong engagement with popular music that is an enlivening leitmotif of his memoir. "I can't overstate the importance of topical folk songs to my political development," he says, and like many of his generation he was learning from Bob Dylan, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones long before he finally got around to reading Marx in prison.

The African-American civil rights movement was the seedbed of Dancis's activism, as it was for many young radicals. Galvanized by images of police brutality in Birmingham, he found his way at age 15 to the March on Washington in August 1963. In June 1965 he was again in Washington, this time to protest the escalating war in Vietnam. And like many high school seniors at the time, Dancis was beginning to contemplate the existential choices posed by the draft.

In the fall of 1965, Dancis entered Cornell, and the bulk of his memoir is devoted to his local activism there as a leader of the Students for a Democratic Society chapter. Dancis was on the radar of the FBI from the moment he attended his first SDS meeting in November 1965 and caught the eye of Cornell officials reporting to the bureau. With the help of his FBI file to jog his memory, he carefully and engagingly reconstructs his political journey through the spring of 1969.

Although he recounts his encounters with national New Left celebrities—Abbie Hoffman, David Dellinger, Joan



Resister: A Story of Protest and Prison during the Vietnam War

By Bruce Dancis

Cornell University Press, 384 pp., \$29.95

Baez, and especially Daniel Berrigan—Dancis's focus is on local events. This is intentional because one of the things he hopes his memoir will do—and it does successfully—is drive home the decentralized character of New Left radicalism generally and SDS activism in particular. As he says:

SDS, more than most groups on the left, was decentralized and often dysfunctional as a national organization. When an SDS national convention or one of the quarterly National Council meetings adopted a program, many local chapters didn't follow through on them. The history of SDS is actually the story of hundreds of different chapters.

The history of the Cornell SDS was a good deal more eventful than that of most SDS groups, and Dancis vividly narrates a series of confrontations between radical students and a university administration befuddled by their concerns and cursed with ineptitude. Race was often at the heart of things at Cornell, and racial conflict there culminated in the dramatic events of April 1969 when dozens of African-American students occupied one of the principal campus buildings and later armed themselves with guns.

Dancis was a leader among white students supporting the black militants, and

Robert Westbrook teaches American history at the University of Rochester.

he tries vigorously to put their resort to armed self-defense in a context that explains and justifies it. Here he strains my sympathies, but Dancis is offering an invitation to argument rather than trying to foreclose it. One just wishes he had been as hard on himself in this instance as he is in others in which he forthrightly takes his younger self to task. Armed self-defense in the face of murderous Klansmen is one thing; picking up a gun to ward off a belligerent band of frat brothers quite another.

But the centerpiece of Dancis's politics at the time was the battle with the draft and the war it sustained. The most fateful day of his life was December 14, 1966, when he tore up his draft card in front of a crowd on the Cornell campus, then mailed the pieces to his draft board. Dancis was among the first to destroy his draft card and thereby move from anti-war protest to antiwar resistance and civil disobedience. "I knew I was forcing the issue," he writes, "and would undoubtedly go to prison for my actions. But resistance had to start sometime, so why not now? And if it had to start with one person taking a stand and saying no, why shouldn't that person be me?"

Dancis thought he might be arrested immediately, but it was not until May 1969 that he found himself in the federal prison in Ashland, Kentucky (of which one alumnus is Bayard Rustin). The concluding chapters of his book describe his nearly two years in prison. Most of his fellow inmates were white car thieves who had crossed state lines. For the most part he kept his head down, worked on his jump shot, and resumed his education. (The three volumes of Marx's *Capital*, he tells us, doubled nicely for weightlifting.) These chapters are harrowing, all the more so because of Dancis's refusal to make things sound worse than they were.

Upon his release from prison in December 1970, Dancis resumed his undergraduate education at the Santa Cruz campus of the University of California. Following graduate school at Stanford, he went on to a fine career as a journalist and editor in northern California. Now retired and still apparently in possession of a homestead at Three Arrows, he remains a democratic social-

ist and a "dreamer," even though "the political goals of my life remain unmet, as was the case with my parents and my grandparents before them."

In the late 1960s, whenever someone accused Dancis of draft dodging, he made it clear that far from dodging the draft, he confronted and resisted it openly. And though he is too diffident to say so himself, he did it with exceptional courage.

Dancis admits that his inordinate hope that draft resistance would become a mass movement that would clog the nation's jails and bring a swift conclusion to the war fell far short of realization. On the other hand, he plausibly argues that the movement he led played a significant role in ending the draft. Ironically, though, the end of the draft removed a deterrent to launching subsequent wars, and if anything it enhanced the odds that those Americans who died in them would continue to hail disproportionately from certain communities.

Nonetheless, Bruce Dancis's resistance did more than the efforts of most to bring the Vietnam War home and, all too eventually, to bring it to an end. It was a gift to his country. And so too, if far more modestly, is his memoir.

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Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism

By Amy DeRogatis

Oxford University Press, 224 pp., \$24.95

In their 1972 sex manual for Christians, Tim and Beverly LaHaye wrote that sex is “the most thrilling, exciting, and fulfilling experience in the world (if done properly).” Their very popular *The Act of Marriage*—still in print—is just one in a long tradition of books of sexual advice for Christians.

Contrary to the stereotype that they are unable or unwilling to talk about sex, evangelicals of every stripe are handing out advice on sexuality for every moment of a (heterosexual) person’s life. In *Saving Sex*, Amy DeRogatis explores the world of evangelical sex manuals, from purity books for teens to childbearing books for young mothers,

by authors from the LaHayes to T. D. Jakes.

“Anyone who has observed American evangelical culture over the past few decades knows that . . . evangelicals can’t stop talking about sex,” DeRogatis writes. They talk about how sex is a blessing from God, how God created sex for the purposes of human pleasure, how important female sexual pleasure is, and so on. This is not the sex-shaming culture of the past.

The difficulty, however, comes in the LaHayes’ phrase, “if done properly.” DeRogatis writes, “With regard to sexuality, like so many other things in evangelical culture, there is a gap between the ideal and the real.” Christian sex advice manuals focus on the ideal: how to behave sexually in accordance with God’s most ideal plan, whose life is the most exemplary, and what happens when things deviate from that most ideal plan—sin, evil, perhaps even demon possession. Evangelical rhetoric generally places a high premium on the ideal and raises the stakes, tying proper sexual behavior to salvation itself.

DeRogatis reveals the variety of discourse within evangelical subcultures. The message about sexuality is not consistent across demographics, and many details are up for debate. I found myself wondering what would happen if the young girls reading *Before You Meet Prince Charming: A Guide to Radiant Purity* were given the helpmeet literature intended for women who are already married. There they would learn what to do if Prince Charming turns out to be a less-than-desirable husband. The answer: sexual submission. “Many writers,” DeRogatis writes, “highlight episodes of betrayal and disappointment in their own marriages as examples of opportunities for women to submit to unlikeable husbands as a demonstration of submission to God.” What effect would reading this have on

the fantasies of young Christian women about their future spouses?

One particularly illuminating moment in *Saving Sex* comes when DeRogatis points out that a great deal of evangelical sexual advice literature, especially of the most idealistic kind, is written by and for white people, with a distinct racial subtext. This subtext comes in the form of “images, language, examples, and textual cues.” When DeRogatis turns to examples from nonwhite evangelical sex advice, we immediately perceive a distinctive change in voice and content. In the works of Juanita Bynum and T. D. Jakes, the subject changes from purity to healing and from rigidity to openness, and the voice from that of the expert to one of a co-traveler.

Granted, as DeRogatis points out, much of African-American evangelical sex advice is just as rule-governed as that written by white people, and the authors seem just as eager to keep people out of the wrong beds. But at the very least, they gently acknowledge a shared humanness. The dynamic between the ideal and the real shifts considerably.

This brings us back to DeRogatis’s thesis: that Christian evangelical sex literature sends a fundamentally positive message about sex even if within tight boundaries. I don’t think that assessment is quite right, at least not for white evangelical sex literature. I would argue that the distance between the ideal and the real is so great that the ultimate message is shame. Are you a young girl who kissed a boy? Shame. Are you a young woman struggling to get pregnant? Sin. Are you a young couple who is not finding sex to be the “most thrilling, exciting, and fulfilling experience” ever? Shame. Are you a woman too tired to “minister” to your husband’s sexual needs? Sin.

We could multiply exponentially the number of human sexual experiences that deviate from the ideal, and I am not sure that totals up to a “sex-positive” message. What remains mysterious to me is why so many people would buy so many books that tell them that they are doing it wrong.

Reviewed by Amy Frykholm, CENTURY associate editor.

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We Make the Road by Walking: A Year-Long Quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation, and Activation

By Brian D. McLaren
Jericho, 304 pp., \$25.00

For its potential usefulness in the congregation, this book is as good as sun on soil. Academics may find no theological breakthrough here, but the ones who care about church life may still do a double take. A leading voice of the so-called emerging church interprets the Bible story in a manner that is uncommonly accessible and arresting, and also conversant with contemporary scholarship.

McLaren is aiming to draw both pastors and laypersons into conversation and conspiracy. Christian faith, he says, involves shaking off mere convention and taking part in subversive upheaval. Such faith is story-shaped, so in service to God's reign it takes for its compass the whole drama that culminates in Christ. Faith aims for social transformation, seeking peace and justice without descending into violence. Engaging the whole life, it not only requires much, but also grants much. Discipleship is countercultural and hard; at the same time it's a path to fellowship and "true aliveness." If faith is participation in an "uprising," it is also the healing of the self.

The heart of the book is 52 short chapters, set forth with a view to both the liturgical year and the needs of discussion groups. Each chapter takes key Bible passages as a reference point. Interpretation centers first on Genesis and proceeds, along lines suggested by scripture itself, all the way to the book of Revelation. Chapters end with six discussion questions, always including one especially for children. One of the appendices contains "guidelines for learning circles."

McLaren refers at the beginning to "a new moment of emergence, pulsing with danger and promise." This signals his intention to advance the cause of "Emergence Christianity," or what he

calls an "emerging spiritual movement in service of aliveness." Leaders of this movement take as their basic premise (aside from faith itself) the cultural shift called to mind by the term *post-modern*. By their lights that shift involves relativism, whether extreme and deeply skeptical or merely a kind of humility in its grasping after truth. It involves democratization of information, with attendant undermining of hierarchy, and new awareness of religious diversity accompanied by growing reluctance to scorn or dismiss what others believe.

One result is growing doubt about whether anyone sees objectively, or whether any authority, not least that of sacred texts and sacred institutions, deserves to be trusted. This puts more and more pressure on institutional Christianity. Traditional church life—its doctrinal fixations, collusion with violence, lack of humility and unwillingness to change—seems increasingly off-key, and people, especially young people, are walking away from it.

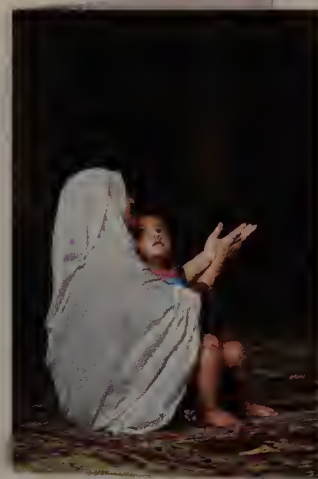
Movement leader Phyllis Tickle names this cultural shift the Great Emergence and likens it to an every-500-years "hinge time" such as the Great Reformation and the Great Schism between the Christian East and West. If hinge times are a threat, they are also, according to Emergence Christianity, an opportunity.

For one thing, "rummage sales" can take place. It's important now to let go of top-down, or Constantinian, Christianity; the same goes for ungracious responses to people outside the church. At hinge times the radically new can break in. One urgent need is for fresh (noninerrantist) appropriation of scripture, a reading that sees Christ as both climax of the Bible story and model of authentic Christian existence. Another is for new embrace of the Holy Spirit. Amid cultural cataclysm, the Christian calling requires persistent, Spirit-guided conversation about what to think and do.

Emergence Christianity returns

Reviewed by Charles Scriven, author of The Transformation of Culture: Christian Social Ethics after H. Richard Niebuhr (Herald).

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again and again to the Holy Spirit, who is thought to provide both authority and energy for renewal. The Spirit is untamable, not subject to our settled assumptions. It is the divine reality within, throwing us off balance, teasing new discernment out of human brokenness. Emergent movement critics (with whom I sometimes resonate) say that this emphasis elevates experiences over the authority of scripture. But for McLaren, the Holy Spirit extends the ministry of Jesus, the one whose story is told in scripture. To be alive in the Spirit is to attend to the Bible for the purpose of ever deepening discipleship.

McLaren does not invoke Bartimaeus, the blind beggar (Mark 10) whose newfound faith consists in learning and living on the road with Jesus. But if you introduced his book by telling that story, you'd be using scripture to communicate its point—and back it up.

Touchdowns for Jesus and Other Signs of Apocalypse: Lifting the Veil on Big-Time Sports

By Marcia W. Mount Shoop
Cascade, 134 pp., \$16.00 paperback

After Notre Dame upset Army in 1924, Grantland Rice penned one of the most enduring football tropes in American sports journalism. He used a biblical image—the four horsemen of the apocalypse—to emphasize the terminating power of the Fighting Irish backfield. Wreaking metaphorical famine, pestilence, destruction, and death on their gridiron opponents, they then led their team to an undefeated season.

Marcia Mount Shoop realigns football with apocalyptic thought by using the theological concept of “the unveiling of truth” to analyze the systemic dysfunction of professional football and

of the near-professional football programs at major universities. She pursues this theological critique because, as she observes, sports “capture our imagination and elicit our deepest emotional outpourings much more than any religion does.”

Acknowledging that references to apocalypticism suggest a cosmic cataclysm, complete destruction, and final judgment, Mount Shoop nonetheless identifies the core of apocalyptic not with the end of the world but with its power to disclose distortions, defeat evil, and introduce radical change. She also understands that sports can provide vitality, strengthen community, and inspire transformation. An apocalyptic analysis exposes the demonic tendency of big-time football to perpetuate systemic sexism, racism, and classism, and it helps to restore the potential of sports to provide redemption by revealing people's true identity. In light of the current domestic violence and child abuse cases

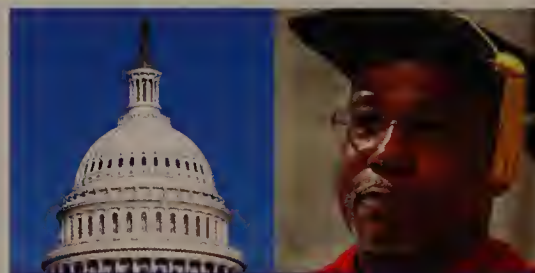
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involving National Football League players Ray Rice, Adrian Peterson, and Greg Hardy, her critique is all the more pertinent.

Mount Shoop is uniquely positioned to bring this creative reflection to bear on a sport she loves. A Presbyterian minister with a doctorate in theology, she also knows sports from the inside as a former celebrated college track athlete and as the wife of John Shoop, a prominent Big Ten coach who formerly served as the offensive coordinator with the Chicago Bears.

Empathizing with fans who believe that the world makes more sense in a stadium than it does anywhere else, Mount Shoop explores why they care so deeply about football. One factor is fans' creation of "fantasms"—the projected identities of players, coaches, and teams on the basis of their respective roles. Fans' vitriolic cries against a coach, for instance, ignore the true character of the person on the field. The screams are directed to a phantom of the coach and simply express the fans' hopes and dreams about the game. Their shouts in frustration reveal the depth of their identification with the team itself.

Mount Shoop also prophetically decries the institutional distortions and abuses of big-time football, drawing on sociological data and personal experience to support her argument. The demographic and economic statistics are the most revealing. Although 65 percent of the players in the NFL are black, the economic benefit of their play overwhelmingly goes to a few nonplayers, particularly the team owners, all of whom are white. In fact, the financial disequilibrium is so severe that the majority of NFL alumni face bankruptcy within two years of retirement. In the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the disparity between the economic advantages and disadvantages of the privileged and the poor is equally striking. Although the NCAA's revenue in a recent academic year approached \$1 billion, most of the players in Division I football and basketball, who generate the bulk of the funds, live below the poverty line.

To personalize these racial and economic issues, Mount Shoop focuses on the situations of accused student athletes at

the University of North Carolina, where her husband had served as an assistant coach before he was fired—along with the entire coaching staff—during an NCAA investigation of 18 football players and one coach, all African American. They had been suspected of NCAA infractions related to academic regulations and rules about support of student athletes. In large part this book provides Mount Shoop with an opportunity to engage in a kind of liberation theology, constructing a narrative and conducting an analysis from the perspective of those who were under investigation.

At the heart of her complaint is the story of Devon Ramsay, a former NFL prospect and a student mired in deep poverty. Ramsay was accused of academic dishonesty for having followed the suggestion of a tutor to shift a couple of sentences in one of his essays. Without any evidence—the paper itself no longer existed at the time of the university's investigation—he was withheld from games because of the possibility of an infraction.

According to Mount Shoop, the university had repeatedly advised Ramsey not to secure legal counsel because doing so would imply guilt. During the investigation he had no recourse to a statement of his rights because no such statement exists in the NCAA's rulebook. He was eventually exonerated, but without the challenge of regular competition, he lost ground to other pro prospects, and his hopes for a football career were sacked.

During one interim between school terms, another player whose family was trapped in poverty had fainted because he hadn't eaten for days. He had been receiving his allotted per diem for food while the university's cafeteria was closed, but he had sent the money home to help his family pay the bills. If he had accepted a complimentary meal while receiving his food allowance, his eligibility would have been endangered.

Mount Shoop points out that many athletes cannot afford to purchase appropriate clothing for professional job

interviews, yet they would violate NCAA regulations if they were given a business suit. By contrast, no stipulations exist against supplying a suit for a scholarship student in law or business.

Although these cases might seem to beg for a sociological analysis rather than a theological one, Mount Shoop focuses on the spiritual challenges of these situations by questioning how in such a distorted football culture Christians can fulfill the biblical imperative to feed the hungry and care for the poor without placing oppressed players in a more precarious situation.

Though she asserts that "there is more to cultivating just systems and thriving communities than good intentions and individual accountability," her suggestions for transforming the dystopia of big-time sports depend on individual action rather than systemic revision. Nonetheless, her astute critique in *Touchdowns for Jesus* reveals her deep faith and her palpable love of football and family.

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Reviewed by Joseph L. Price, professor of religious studies at Whittier College in Whittier, California, and editor of the Sports and Religion Series published by Mercer University Press.

Capital in the Twenty-First Century

By Thomas Piketty,
translated by Arthur Goldhammer
Harvard University Press,
696 pp., \$39.95

Income disparity in the developed world is approaching levels seen only in predemocratic times. Though the spread of educational opportunities has a leveling effect, the income gap is likely to continue to expand—eventually undermining the viability of democratic capitalism.

This stark message from French economist Thomas Piketty has made his extensively documented book a best seller and the object of much scholarly and popular scrutiny. He foresees social unrest arising from increasing income disparities and believes the political dysfunction present in the United States and elsewhere can be attributed to a looming battle between those who seek to protect the income disparity and those who seek to counter it.

The documentation of his thesis is no simple matter. The data presented include charts and graphs that cover the 20th century and in some cases go back to the 18th. Of chief importance is data on the percentage of national income received by the top 10 percent of United States citizens over the past century.

Early in the 20th century, the wealthiest 10 percent received 45 percent of national income. The shocks of the Great Depression and World War II diminished

their portion to 35 percent, but beginning in 1980 the wealth of the top decile began to grow. The wealthiest 10 percent now enjoys nearly 50 percent of national wealth, and they are likely to get even richer.

Two concepts are central to Piketty's analysis of income share. The first concerns the ratio of capital to income. As the ratio rises, capital owners get a larger share of an economy's income. Consider, for example, the case of an owner of a lawn service who hires six workers to mow lawns with push mowers. The mowers have a total value of \$3,000, and the annual revenue from the business is \$1,000. If the owner's annual return on his capital investment of \$3,000 is 5 percent, then the owner's annual revenue from the business will be \$150. The six workers share the remaining \$850, earning slightly over \$140 each.

Consider then what happens if the owner were to purchase a riding mower valued at \$6,000. Assuming he still gets a 5 percent return on capital, the owner would get \$300 of the \$1,000 revenue and the six laborers would have to split \$700, or \$117 each. The income disparity between the capital owner and the laborer rises as the ratio of capital to income rises. This variable is sometimes referred to as the capital intensity of production.

This story helps illustrate a second key concept. The return on capital to the owner remained at 5 percent as capital intensity increased, even though income growth was zero. If income had grown at 5 percent, to \$1,050, the workers would have shared \$750 or \$124 each. Thus the growth rate of the economy is an important variable in determining differences in income shares.

Putting these two concepts together, Piketty argues that the more capital intensive the economy is and the slower its rate of growth, the bigger the income gap between capital owners and laborers. In the industrial revolution of the late 18th century, small shop production gave way to large factories, significantly expanding the capital intensity. The wealth gap between the rich factory owners and the laborers grew dramatically despite economic growth. In the 20th century, capital depletion from war and economic depression lowered the

capital-to-income ratio and reduced income disparities. However, after World War II the capital-to-income ratio again increased significantly and is now reaching new heights.

Clearly many factors complicate the historical data and qualify the key concepts, and Piketty does not ignore them. He considers ways of figuring national income, differences in culture and tax policy, and differences between earned and inherited income. He pays particular attention to the accumulated wealth of the top few percent of the population whose capital return is paid not in rent received on property but in exorbitant corporate salaries. (If the six lawn-care workers in the example above had been fired when the new mower arrived, the one remaining super mower could have gotten a super salary similar to what some CEOs and top managers get in salary and bonuses today.)

Piketty recognizes the necessary role of entrepreneurship and free exchange markets and that these activities generate some legitimate income disparities. However, the way intergenerational fortunes can grow and market prices can be distorted frequently leads to disparities that have no economic justification.

Since the 18th century, market models suggest that remuneration should be based on merit as measured by productivity in a free market. Open competition among actors in labor and product markets is supposed to prevent excess prices and wages. But in some markets, Piketty observes, the producer has monopoly power or possesses information that the average consumer does not have, or may simply be lucky in a volatile economy. When this situation leads to wealth accumulation that compounds across generations, the meritocracy of capitalism evolves into an autocracy similar to that of earlier eras.

Piketty examines university endowments and finds that the return on capital increases as the amount of wealth managed increases. This gives special

Reviewed by James Halteman, an economist and coauthor of Reckoning with Markets: Moral Reflection in Economics (Oxford University Press).

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advantage to the wealthy and widens income disparity. Inflation also alters wealth and, despite its varied impacts, ultimately benefits those with well-managed wealth more than those who have little. These factors, plus the creative legal and accounting structures that the wealthy devise to protect their wealth, raise questions about how free and just markets are in the allocation of wealth.

Given these concerns, the case can be made for leveling the economic playing field. In the latter part of his book Piketty spells out several ways to achieve that goal. "Can we imagine a 21st century in which capitalism will be transcended in a more peaceful and more lasting way, or must we simply await the next crisis or the next war (this time truly global)?" Piketty asks. "Can we imagine political institutions that might regulate today's global patrimonial capitalism justly as well as efficiently?"

Taxes, transfers, and governmental provision of social goods and services have always been the tools of public policy, but they became increasingly important in the 20th century. From 1870 to 1910, most European countries and the United States took less than 10 percent of national income in taxes. As society became more interdependent and older, more demanding of advanced medical technology, and more conscious of the need for formal education, the public sector's share of national income increased—to 30 percent in the United States and to 40 or even 55 percent in much of Western Europe. World War II

and ongoing national security concerns played a part in that increase, but the social dislocation and the lessons learned in the Depression opened the way for the social state that has become the focus of public policy in recent times.

Piketty's first proposal is for a global tax on capital. A tax on capital is needed to make the overall tax structure fairer and economically efficient, and a global version of the tax would prevent capital from moving from one country to another for tax reasons. Even without a global tax, a regional tax on capital might work to reduce income disparities by bringing the rate of return on capital closer to the rate of growth in income. Revenue from this tax would provide funds for necessary social programs like health care, education, retirement pensions, and income support. While income transfers are sometimes controversial, they make up a relatively small part of social spending.

In all his policy suggestions, Piketty aims to have the market and the public sector complement each other in such a way that economic efficiency is maintained and public goods are not neglected. Yet his overarching theme—that increased income disparity as a threat to democratic capitalism—remains prominent.

Perhaps the most persuasive policy suggestion in the book is for an 80 percent marginal tax rate on the highest income levels and a more progressive estate tax. Most Americans will be surprised to learn that from 1940 until the 1980s the top marginal income tax rate in the United States was in the 80 percent

range for unearned income and nearly as high for wage and salary income.

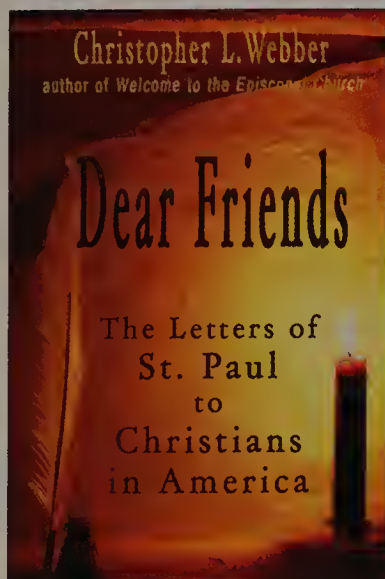
In Piketty's proposal, only the top 1 percent or top 0.5 percent of earners would face the highest rate. Evidence shows that high tax rates on multimillion-dollar bonuses and super salaries do not undermine work incentives in any significant way. Most likely high tax rates will reduce the demand for such high salaries and free up resources for lower paid workers. Thus the tax would not be a big revenue raiser, but it would reduce income disparities. Because inherited wealth is generally viewed as unearned income, there is less political resistance to high marginal rates on the largest estates. High estate taxes on large estates would also reduce income disparities.

Many Americans will resist calls for a more involved state and for higher marginal tax rates. Piketty, for his part, says little to address concerns about governmental failures and inefficiencies that might complicate the implementation of such policies.

Nevertheless, without some policy changes, it is hard to imagine that countries can avoid the move toward the income disparity that Piketty describes. The emergence of self-driving cars and robotic applications represent the kind of innovation that leads to capital intensive production. His concerns about social unrest cannot be ignored: the movement from personal interdependence to impersonal global interdependence tends to erode trust and voluntary sharing, and wealth disparities are increasingly seen as unmerited and unfair.

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Marriage on the edge

Gone Girl, both the book which has sold 8.5 million copies and the movie, has touched a nerve. As I settled into my seat to watch the film with a friend, clusters of women chatted around us. I realized that the movie had inspired many girls' nights out.

Using the unscientific method of listening to theater murmurings, I learned several things about the audience. First, most of the women had read the book and knew what to expect. Second, most of the men in the audience had not read the book, and the plot took them by surprise. Finally, the women in the theater shared a subtle current of delight over the agency of the main character.

Ben Affleck and Rosamund Pike star as the gorgeous Nick and Amy Dunne. The story opens on their fifth anniversary, when Nick comes home and finds evidence of violence in his living room. His beautiful wife is missing.

Gone Girl seems to be the story of a husband who has killed his wife and is trying to get away with it. Certainly Nick is no angel. As the couple's story emerges we learn that he's been inattentive, indifferent, and even cruel to his wife. He has misspent money, ignored Amy's social isolation, and even had an affair (Emily Ratajkowski). But midway through the film the theory of Nick's guilt is abruptly challenged.

Amy is smart, unflinching, and sociopathic. Gillian Flynn, who wrote both the book and the screenplay, deftly shows the significance of a person's perceived image. Amy's image of herself is, at least in part, based on a fictionalized persona. When she was a child her parents wrote a book series with an "Amazing Amy" heroine. Years later Amy still lives in the

shadow of that character. As the plot progresses, we see that both Amy and Nick live out false images of themselves.

Flynn's brilliance is in placing Nick and Amy's fictional marriage on the teetering edge between ordinary marriages and evil ones. Her married readers and viewers are right on that cliff with Nick and Amy. We identify with the normal difficulties of their married life. We know that image plays a role in marriage and that behind closed doors things can shift. And we know that we can't fully know our own partners—there's a part of another human being that is always a mystery. When the story reveals the evil next to the mundane, the audience feels the rush of both recognition and horror.

This juxtaposition is encapsulated in the dialogue. "You're delusional," Nick says to Amy. "I mean, you're insane. . . . I loved you, and then all we did was resent

each other, try to control each other. We caused each other pain."

Amy—cold and beautiful—smiles and says, "That's marriage."

And the audience laughs. We laugh because part of that is true. We laugh because it's horrifying and because we are related to this couple and because we're not this couple.

Flynn is a darkly feminist Stephen King, writing thrillers that center on women who've been twisted by a misogynistic world. Flynn has been accused of hating women. I disagree. She presents the truth of what can happen to women in a world that diminishes them. She nudges that truth just past reality—far enough for the women in the theater to sit at a safe distance from it but near enough that a hidden part of our psyches can cheer for Amy.

This dark portrayal of gender and relationships makes *Gone Girl* riveting.



FAMILIAR HORROR: Did Nick (Ben Affleck) kill his missing wife?

The author is Beth Felker Jones, who teaches theology at Wheaton College.

by Carol Howard Merritt

CHURCH in the MAKING

The church's best days are still ahead," said Cameron Trimble. I shared a conspiratorial smile, as I often do when with her. She is executive director of the Center for Progressive Renewal, where I am a consultant. She was telling me about Convergence, a network that she is dreaming up with a group of people, including authors Brian McLaren and Diana Butler Bass.

As Trimble talked about Convergence, I imagined her standing in that long pattern of creation which reverberates through our ancient texts. God spoke into the chaos, and

The church's new foundation

deliver the magical liquid, longing becomes word, and word becomes object.

In our ecclesial bodies, as the Spirit moves over the chaos, fear, and passion, our yearnings begin to wear syllables. The utterances begin to organize into movements and structures. One of those structures is Convergence.

"Convergence is about taking the best of our denominations, seminaries, and heritages and working with one another in new ways that cre-

that the church will look different in the coming years. We see generational shifts as the median age of our congregations becomes closely aligned with the retirement age. We notice geographical movement as younger generations move to urban areas for education and jobs, diminishing the size of rural congregations. We respond by planting new congregations with the assets of closing congregations. We have engaged in conversations, articulating

They plan to train leaders who can create new organizations and renew existing ones. They intend to develop a campus ministry network. And in order to do these things, they need to maintain channels of communication and support.

Like the body of Christ, each person has a different function. Writers like Brian McLaren put longing into words. Organizers like Trimble understand how to build institutional structure. Innovators like Episcopal priest Stephanie Spellers understand the big picture and can reflect theologically on this creation.

"My hope is that we will look back at this moment in the life of the church many years from now and know that because we found new ways of collaborating to address the challenges of our age, we built a foundation that ensured the church's best days are still ahead," said Trimble. "The collective human and environmental challenges of this moment are larger than any church or denomination alone can address. We, finally, need each other and are ready to work across denominational lines to find new possibilities for our shared future."

We long for a new kind of church, but we're not sure what it will look like.

the words formed order as they gathered waters, brought forth vegetation, gave rise to animals, and molded humanity. The birth of Jesus Christ, the answer to longing prayers, is described as the Word made flesh.

We see creation in these grand narratives, and we also watch it unfold in our everyday lives. A 13-month-old toddler has not begun to speak, so she stands before the refrigerator, with her arm out and her tiny fist grabbing at air, and grunts. The guttural noises let her parents know that she *wants*. Eventually her "meh, meh, meh" will become "milk." When her parents

ate new possibilities for our future," Trimble said.

"We see a world where a United Methodist firmly rooted in Methodism is working collaboratively with a Pentecostal to start a new ministry to address poverty in their neighborhood. We see Roman Catholics partnering with the United Church of Christ to address climate change. Convergence is a call to action for the Christian church to proclaim a generous Christianity that welcomes all people as children of God, reconciling us one to the other and to our earth."

Many of us stand like grunting toddlers, knowing

what we want to see happen.

Throughout this process, we're pumping our fists, longing for something, but we're not sure what it will look like.

Convergence is working to bring people and resources together in order to move the chaos and conversation into structure. Supporters of Convergence have a few goals that have to do with media, social justice, and leadership formation. They hope to lift up the profiles of churches, organizations, and individuals who work for the common good. They want to take action on social initiatives.

Carol Howard Merritt is author of *Tribal Church*.

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The Last Judgment, by Marcello Venusti

Marcello Venusti (ca. 1512–1579) was hired in 1549 to make a copy of Michelangelo's famous *Last Judgment* (1535–1541) in the Sistine Chapel, as a precaution against the church destroying the fresco because it disapproved of the nude figures. This copy allows us to see how Michelangelo intended the figures to look (they were clothed at various times during the 16th to 18th centuries). The beardless Christ is in control of the ascending and descending action. With one arm he draws up people from their graves; with the other, he consigns to hell those who are condemned. With their trumpet call, angels situated in the lower center announce Christ's judgment. The artist drew on a cacophony of scriptures that depict Christ as judge (Matt. 25:33–36, 24:30–31; Acts 10:42; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 19:11–16), but expanded the scene beyond the biblical witness: Mary is positioned on Christ's right side, and on surrounding clouds, martyred saints look toward their savior. Below, a serpent, echoing the tempter in Eden, binds a figure in hell. In the lower right, Charon, ferryman for the dead in Greek mythology, herds the unrighteous out of his boat. *The Last Judgment* tells viewers that the ecclesiastical and political leaders are not the ultimate judge; Christ is.

Art selection and commentary by Heidi J. Hornik, who teaches in the art department at Baylor University, and Mikeal C. Parsons, who teaches in the school's religion department.



Read **Samuel Wells** @
Faith Matters



“By committing themselves to meet regularly together, Christians become aware of those who are not gathering together—those who are absent. This is how the community develops the practice of pastoral care and evangelism, the skill of memory for those missing, the virtue of love for the lost, and the notion of the communion of saints.”

(from Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics)



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